

MANIMEKALAI



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FOREWORD

Manimekalai and *Cilappatikaram* are considered by many as twin-epics as they are very much related to each other. Both of them belong to the same age and deal with the story of the same family. While *Cilappatikaram* is the story of *Kannaki*, *Manimekalai* is that of *Manimekalai*, the daughter of *Kovalan* (the husband of *Kannaki*) through *Madhavi*, the dancing woman. It is also said that the authors of both the epics *Ilango* and *Sethalai Sathanar* have mutually agreed to write the respective work with the blessings of each other. It is said that though the two epics, between themselves, clearly expound the four *purusharttas*, the first three of them, namely, Virtue (*aram*), Wealth (*porul*) and Love (*inbam*) are clearly delineated by *Cilappatikaram*, and the last of them, namely Bliss of Release (*Vidu*) by *Manimekalai*.

This is also the story of a woman, a woman of not only of great chastity but also a woman who is very much concerned with the poor and hungry. *Manimekalai's* inner struggles between her passionate love for the prince who was her husband in the previous birth and her ardent desire for spiritual service are picturesquely described by the poet. Finally her desire for serving mankind triumphs and with the help of the magic bowl she is able to appease the hunger of the poor, the have-nots, the needy and the criminals alike. The prison house turns into the "House of *Dharma*".

Sethalai Sathanar is one of the brilliant poets of Tamilnadu who is known for his powerful images, poetic beauty and truth, musical diction, moving words, passionate and powerful phrases, sentiments and feelings, and above all for his unabated leanings towards *Buddhism*. If *Cilappatikaram* is credited for its well-balanced treatment of religious tenets and canons, *Manimekalai* is known for its *Buddhist* propaganda, depiction of supernatural trends, of numerous allusions to *Buddhist* mythology and philosophy, its contempt for the tenets and the followers of other religions, especially of Jainism. At the same time it does not fail to impress upon the readers certain important human values like the glory of chastity, the justice of the king, the

feeding of the hungry, the helping of the poor, service to the needy, the importance of *Dharma*, faith in traditional values and culture and respect for elders etc.

As it is very often said, *Manimekalai* is a precious jewel of Tamil literature and its impact and influence go a long way giving rise to a new development in Tamil literature bringing intellectual debates, philosophical and religious tenets and canons into literary works and thereby giving literary grandeur to them. Literature, it seems, is not only "criticism of life" but also a powerful medium for propagation of one's ideals and ideology.

The Tamil University has recently launched an ambitious project, **Translation Of Tamil Classics Into English** and I am very happy to say that within a short span of time several works have been taken up.

Classics like,

1. Cilappatikaram
2. Manimekalai
3. Bharathiyar Songs
4. Tirukkovaaiyar

have been completed and the following are in progress:

5. Akananuru
6. Purananuru
7. Periyapuranam and
8. Kalittokai

I am sure that these translations will be of great use to understand the poetic tradition of Indian Literature in general and Tamil Literature in particular.

20-10-1989,
Thanjavur.

- Dr. S. Agesthalingom,
Vice-Chancellor.

PREFACE

It was nearly ten years ago that the renowned historian and Tagore scholar, Professor Niharranjan Ray, suggested that I should translate the Tamil epic *Manimekalai* into English. It seemed an impossible task, but my father encouraged me to accept the challenge. Since then, my parents, Prof. K.R.Srinivasa Iyengar and Srimati Padmasani, have given me constant support in this absorbing if difficult work. To them, my loving gratitude.

I have followed Dr. U.V.Swaminatha Iyer's incomparable edition of *Manimekalai* throughout. In a few places, the commentary of Sri P.V.Somasundaranar has also been of significant help.

As for the translation, certainly it is not the pure gold of *Sathanar*. Indeed, no translation can ever project perfectly the sweetness and sublimity of *Sathanar*. My best hope is that this translation will bring the English reader unacquainted with Tamil a little closer to the great epic, *Manimekalai*.

Blank verse was a natural choice to translate a poem composed in Tamil *asiriyappa*. It also helped me to be literal, even if sometimes it had to be at the expense of poetic beauty. As for the notes, I have included only the minimum of explanatory information that the reader would need to understand the poem.

I am grateful to Sri. T.N.Ramachandran, Prof. S.N.Kandaswamy and Prof. K.G.Seshadri for going through the translation and helping me to come face to face with my own inadequacies. If, in spite of our collective effort, any errors have crept in, I can only blame myself and crave the scholar-reader's forgiveness.

My heartfelt thanks are due to Prof. S.Agesthalingom, Vice-Chancellor, Tamil University, for including my work in the University's ambitious programme of publishing the classics of Tamil in English. I should also like to thank Dr. P.Chinnian, Registrar, Tamil University for his unfailing courtesy and help facilitating the publication of this translation.

To my husband, M.S.Nandakumar, I owe thanks as always for his patience and understanding during this adventure of translation that, however, tossed me at times into depths of depression.

For myself, living in the *Manimekalai* universe has been an enriching ascesis paralleled only by those years of my doctoral and post-doctoral research when I was half-lost in Sri Aurobindo's mystic and symbolistic epic in English, *Savitri*. When I took up *Manimekalai* for translation, I began as a novice, but the glorious world of ancient Tamil literature soon held me in thrall. With the infallible guidance of Dr. U.V.Swaminatha Iyer to help me, I gained the needed self-confidence as the work progressed. Indeed, his name has been my sustaining talisman while I was engaged in this English translation.

Today I understand, even more than I did 30 years ago when I was launched on my *Savitri* studies, the significance of Sri Aurobindo's words in his Thoughts and Aphorisms: "If thy aim be great and thy means small, still act; for by action alone these can increase to thee." How else can I explain this completed *Manimekalai* in English verse?

Savitri, *Manimekalai*. I conclude by once again bowing in reverence to Sri Aurobindo and *Sathanar* for having enabled us to recognise the Suffrance and Compassion, Power and Grace that are the quadruple glory of heroic Indian womanhood.

20-05-1989,
Srirangam.

- Dr. Prema Nandakumar.

INTRODUCTION

1. The Tamil Epics

After the lyric brilliance of the Sangham Age and ethical puritanism of the *Kural* ambience, the Epic Age was ushered in Tamil Nadu by the Jains with the translation of Gunatya's *Brihat Katha* as *Perunkathai* by *Konguvel*. Much of this early epic literature like *Vasudevanar Sindam* and *Vimbisara Kathai* are now lost.

Tradition speaks of the Five Great Epics -- *Aim Perum Kappiyangal* -- of which the first to be written was, perhaps, *Manimekalai*. It is said that the author, *Sethalai Sathanar*, was a friend of *Ilango Adigal* and re-counted to him the history of *Manimekalai's* parent which prompted *Ilango* to exclaim:

"These are great thoughts: those who forget *Dharma*,
To them *Dharma* becomes destructive *Yama*.
Great men hailing a lady of immense chastity;
The sins of the past taking revenge in the present;
Here was destiny fulfilled through an anklet.
Come! Let us compose an epic on this subject."¹

Sathanar felt that *Ilango* himself was the right person for the task which involved the three royal houses of *Cheras*, *Cholas* and *Pandyas*. Thus it came to pass that Prince *Ilango*, a scion of the *Cheras* became the author of *Silappadhikaram* in which a couple from the *Chola* country came to a tragic end in *Pandyan* city. *Manimekalai* and *Silappadhikaram* are generally known as the twin epics.

The date of the epic *Silappadhikaram* has not yet been settled. Two generally held beliefs give the date as the Second century A.D. or the Ninth century A.D. The same vast divergence in dating appears for *Manimekalai* also. It is in any case clear enough that the two epics were composed not long after the Sangham period.

Silappadhikaram's story is easily told. Having lost his riches to the courtesan *Madhavi*, the merchant *Kovalan* along with his wife *Kannaki* leaves *Pukar*, the Chola capital, for *Maturai*. *Kovalan* is beheaded in the *Pandyan* city on suspicion of having stolen an anklet belonging to the Queen. Realising the enormity of the injustice, the King and the Queen embrace instant death. The chaste *Kannaki* burns up *Maturai* in her anger, retires to *Vanji* and rejoins her husband in the realms beyond. The Chera King, *Senguttuvan*, institutes *Kannaki* worship by installing in a temple the image of the chaste lady carved out of a holy rock brought from the Himalayas.

Manimekalai takes up the story of *Kovalan's* daughter by *Madhavi*. *Manimekalai*, though endowed with a rare loveliness of figure and accomplished in the Fine Arts rejects the love of the Chola Prince *Udayakumaran* and enters a Buddhist nunnery. Entwined with several digressions, the epic is overtly a Buddhist work, written to enshrine Buddhist philosophy.

The third of the 'five great epics' to survive is *Jeevaka Chintamani*. Composed by *Thiruthakka Dhevar*, the epic theme is derived from existing legends scattered in Sanskrit Jain works like *Kshatra Choodamani* and *Gadya Chintamani*. Prince *Jeevakan's* martial exploits and romantic escapades conclude with his being crowned. After a long reign, he gives up his crown in the time-honoured manner of Jain renunciates and engages himself in austerities leading to salvation.

The remaining two epics have not been traced so far. Of these, *Valayapati* was no doubt a Jain *kavya* as indicated by the verses quoted by latter-day critics. *Kundalakesi* was a Buddhist epic written by *Nathagupta*. The *vaisya* maid *Kundalakesi* marries the gambler *Kalan*. Later on, he tries to murder her. She boldly devises a stratagem, kills him and becomes an ascetic far-famed for her thorough knowledge of Buddhist philosophy.

2. Author of *Manimekalai*

Maturai Koolavanihan Sathanar, author of *Manimekalai* was a Buddhist grain merchant and probably hailed from a village named *Seethalai*. Scholars are still debating over the exact date but there is little doubt about his having lived after 2nd century A.D. Though *Sathanar's* name is cited as the Sangham poet who wrote verses for *Natrinal* (3), *Ahananooru* (5), *Purana-nooru* (1) and *Kuruntogai* (1) as well as a verse for *Tiruvalluvamalai*, the generally held belief is that the author of the epic *Manimekalai* was a different person. In fact, the late Prof. S.Vaiyapuri Pillai assigns him to 8th-9th centuries. However, V.Kanakasabhai in his scholarly book, *The Tamils Eighteen Hundred Years Ago* prefers 3rd century A.D. as does Prof. Tirunarayana Iyengar. Researchers of today like N.Balusamy and T.N.Vasudeva Rao also hold on to this dating, chiefly because there is no mention of the *Pallavas* in the epic; and *Pallavas* were a powerful royalty in *Kanchi* since 3rd century A.D.

But Dr.Kandaswamy would take us to 5th century. Among the crucial points mentioned in this connection is that the philosophical exposition of *Buddhism* in the epic follows *Dignaga* and *Dignaga* belongs to the 5th century A.D. Dr. Kandaswamy also points out that *Sathanar's* accounts of *Buddhist* merchants were inspired by *Buddhaghosha's* commentaries on the *Jatakas* and the *Dhammapada*. The stories of *Saduvan*, *Kisa Gowthami* and *Madhavi* have their origin in *Buddhaghosha*. *Buddhaghosha* was a contemporary of *Dignaga*. Another link is *Dhammapala*, a native of *Kanchi* and a classmate of *Buddhaghosha*.

"*Dhammapala* and *Sathanar* might have known each other and perhaps were good friends. Prof. Kuppuswamy Sastrigal opines that *Aravana Adigal* of *Manimekalai* and *Dhammapala* are one and the same person. *Dhammapala*, who served in the *Nalanda* University, describes an earthquake, which shook *Anga Natu*, the country, where he lived. *Aravanar* stayed at *Kanchi* and instructed *Manimekalai* in *Buddhist* logic and philosophy. It is quite suggestive of the fact that *Dhammapala* was a native of *Kanchi*. *Dhammapala* travelled far and wide in India. In the same manner *Aravanar* undertook a tour of *Pukar*, *Ceylon*, *Maturai*, *vanci*, *Kanci*, and *Anga Natu*."2

As far as we are concerned, *Manimekalai* is the reality. And the epic gives ample proof that the author was a profound scholar and a sublime poet. It was after all, no easy task to project the character of *Manimekalai* as a poised flame of aspiration amidst a welter of criss-crossing sub-plots and tame the Tamil language to utter in crystalline terms the intricacies of Indian religious and philosophical systems in general and *Buddhism* in particular.

Sathanar was a friend of *Ilango Adigal*, author of *Silappadhikaram*. The two poets were mutually inspired to take to epic poesy. As a result, we have gained unimpeachable social documentation of the lives of Tamils 2000 years ago. *Sathanar's* descriptions of cities like *Kaveri-p-poompattinam*, *Varji* and *Kanchi* make it obvious that he had personally known them.

Sathanar must have been indeed an image of compassion as is made clear by the epic. *Karuna*, the quality most associated with *Buddha*, is the preiding mood of *Manimekalai*. *Sathanar's* glorification of *karuna* remains superbly alive in the image of his heroine, *Manimekalai*.

Sathanar's enviable command over the Tamil language lifts the epic to the realms of a spiritual testament. A well-read scholar, he is fond of nature descriptions. The Palace garden, for example:

'Our King enjoyed the flower garden
Where the beetles on the branches fluted,
The bees sounded like the strings of a lute,
The nightingales sang and the peacocks danced.

In a corner with a swan sans its mate
 Danced a peacock and its hen in rhythm
 Going round and round, their large wings unfurled;
 The gracious King watched the sight with pleasure,
 As if it were the dance of Lord Krishna
 With his elder brother and Nappinnai.
 The sight of a spangled peacock
 Close to a mango near a flower
 Appeared as though a lovely maid was feeding
 A parrot with milk from a golden plate.
 He laughed to see a male monkey swinging
 Its mate seated on the bejewelled swing
 Specially erected for lovely girls
 Within the garden full of flowering trees."³

It is sheer pleasure to read most of *Manimekalai*. This makes us forget that it was conceived as a poem for religious instruction. The epic satisfies the Johnsonian dictum: "the end of writing is to instruct; the end of poetry is to instruct by pleasing."

3. The Epic

Though the source of *Manimekalai* has not been traced, so far, it is clear that it is in the tradition of *Bodhisattva* tales belonging to Buddhist scriptural lore. Prof. S. Vaiyapuri Pillai opines that the reference in the twenty-first canto about *Manimekalai's* future births would point out to an *avatana* that details the past births of either Sariputta or Moggallana who were the chief disciples of the Buddha. In keeping with Buddhist mythology, the theme of *Manimekalai* is built upon a series of miracles.

4758 lines of *ahavarpa* (blank verse) divided into thirty cantos make up the text of *Manimekalai*. Though the epic is a poem doubled with philosophy, philosophy does not intrude upon the narrative in a heavy way. *Sathanar* has set aside three cantos exclusively for this purpose. 'Listening to the Philosophers' details the various systems of philosophy then prevalent in India: Vaidika system, *Ajivaka*, *Nirgrantha*, *Sankhya*, *Vaiseshika* and *Bhuta Vadas* as well as *Buddhism*. The last two cantos, 'Manimekalai Receives the Dharma' and 'The Maiden's Askesis to Overcome Mortal Birth' take us to the subtler points of Buddhist philosophy. For the rest, it is a pure narrative on which the wings of Buddha's compassion brood, animating the characters in various ways. Hence it is poetic imagination that sits enthroned in *Manimekalai*; the strong, buoyant, simile-studded, stately and superior epic imagination that rings with the universal theme of Buddha's *Karuna*.

The main story is simply told. *Manimekalai*, the accomplished and beautiful daughter of the courtesan *Madhavi* and *Kovalan*, is brought up in the tenets of *Buddhism* by her mother. She has a natural leaning towards renun-

ciation and the performance of charitable works. She is loved by *Udayakumaran*, the *Chola* Prince who pursues her with determination. She is helped by her family deity to go to the island of *Manipallavam* where the Lotus Seat of the *Buddha* reveals to her all about her past births. On understanding the truth about the soul-wearying chain of birth and death, *Manimekalai* resolves to stay firm in the path of renunciation. To help her in this *sadhana*, Goddess *Manimekalai* teaches her three chants that would enable her to take the form she wished, overcome hunger and fly in the air. The guardian angel of the island, *Dipatilakai*, guides *Manimekalai* to the nectar-vessel, *Amuda Surabhi*. With this magic vessel that can produce a limitless quantity of food, *Manimekalai* returns to her native place and engages herself in feeding the poor and the needy. Her charitable disposition pleases the King who allows her to convert the prison in the capital into a House of Charity.

Prince *Udayakumaran* hears of *Manimekalai's* activities in the Town Hall and pursues her there. To escape from his unwelcome attentions, *Manimekalai* puts on the form of a *Vidhyadhara* maid, *Kayachantikai*. Unfortunately, *Kayachantikai's* lover *Kanchanan* comes upon the scene. Angered by the Prince forcing himself into the presence of *Manimekalai* (whom *Kanchanan* takes for his beloved *Kayachantikai*), he kills the Prince. The King imprisons *Manimekalai* suspecting her complicity in the murder, but later releases her. The Queen takes *Manimekalai* to her palace and tortures her in various ways. But the chants help *Manimekalai* overcome the evil intentions of the Queen. The Queen is transformed too after listening to *Manimekalai's* words of wisdom about the chains of births that keeps human beings in thrall:

"From which place did you lament for the Prince?
O gentle woman! You have done wrong.
Did you cry for the body? Or for life?
If it was for the body, who were they
Who burnt him at the crematorium?
If it was for the life, you cannot know
Where it is reborn following its past deeds.
If you have loved the life, then must you love
Every living thing, O gracious lady!"⁴

With the Queen's permission, *Manimekalai* goes to *Nagapuram* and meets King *Punyarajan* who had been *Aaputhran* in an earlier life. She takes him to *Manipallavam* and helps him gain wisdom by saluting the Seat of the *Buddha*. She then proceeds to *Vanji* and worships the images of *Kannaki* and *Kovalan*. *Kannaki* appears before her and reveals the future turn of events. At *Vanji*, *Manimekalai* puts on the robe of an ascetic and meets logicians, philosophers and practitioners of different religions to learn about the foundations of Indian culture. She is not satisfied by any of the philo-

sophies except *Buddhism*. Hence she goes to *Kanchi* and is taught the tenets of *Buddhism* by her preceptor, Sage *Aravana*. After she absorbs all the relevant parts of *Buddhism*, Sage *Aravana* gives her initiation as a nun of the *Buddhist* Order. *Manimekalai* then engages herself in life-long meditation and charitable works to spread the message of the *Buddha* who was compassion incarnate.

As we proceed with the story of *Manimekalai*, we are also drawn into various sub-plots. The most important of them is the life history of *Aaputhran* who had been born out of wedlock to the Brahmin housewife, *Sali*. He leads an exemplary life of compassion and helps the weaker sections of the society. Pleased with him, Goddess *Chintadevi* gives him an *Amudha Surabhi*. *Aaputhran's* charity and fame invoke the wrath of *Indra*. Forced to flee the land of his birth, *Aaputhran* is left alone on the island of *Manipallavam*. He leaves the vessel in the *Gomukhi* lake and embraces a voluntary death. It is this vessel that is given to *Manimekalai* later on.

There are also other stories relating to the abandoned maid *Sutamati*, the chaste wife *Aadirai*, and the ideal lovers *Dharmadatta* and *Visakai*. There is never a dull moment in the epic and though these tales are independent by themselves, they have been woven in the main narrative with natural ease. This is possible because the narrative is in graceful and limpid Tamil which has earned for the author the sobriquet: *tan-Tamil Sathan: Sathanar* who writes in pleasing Tamil. There are no interruptions of high-toned conversations nor deliberate attempts at sublime oratory. A steady flow of the *asiriyappa* with each line almost complete by itself most of the time gives it an *Upanishadic* movement. The epic was no doubt meant for recitation at gatherings of the faithful to expatiate on the glory of renunciation and underline virtues like charity and compassion. Probably the first long poem in Tamil after the Sangham Age of lyricism, *Manimekalai's* style has received uniform praise. Says Mayilai Seeni Venkataswamy:

"*Manimekalai* has several unique points. This epic which has lovely word-embroidery and depth of thought, is not a mere literary work. It is of great use to understand the history, arts and culture of ancient Tamils as well as the religions and traditions of that time in fact, *Manimekalai* is a jewel that adorns Mother Tamil with its incandescent loveliness."⁵

Dr. U.V.Swaminatha Iyer has pointed out how, inspite of being an ardent *Saivite*, he could not stop the flow of tears when he first chanced upon the four lines spoken by Sage *Aravana* in the epic:-

"Those who are born are bound to sorrow.
Those who escape birth gain eternal joy.
Attachment leads to the former; the latter
Is the gain of the non-attached."⁶

A characteristic passage made up of single self-contained lines may be found in *Sutamati's* speech to *Udayakumaran* on the vanity of human wishes and the impermanence of the human body:

"This body is caused by previous deeds.
It is a field for further *karma*; and
Sans decor, mere meat to be cast off.
Subject to age; receptacle of ills.
Cause of desire; container of misdeeds;
A pit that hides the snake known as anger;
Within it is the heart tossed by sorrow,
Fear, helplessness and an endless pain.
Knowing thus, look close at the inner truth."⁷

There are lovely descriptions of gardens in cities like *Vanji*, *Kanchi*, *Savakam*, *Manipallavam* and *Kaveri-p-poompattinam*, truly a delight for the environmentalists. A variety of dramatic scenes involving the flora and fauna in the gardens give the epic an ever-green shimmer. And epic similes assure *Manimekalai* a noble verbal gait. The royal elephant in rut is likened to a ship tossed about in a storm on the high seas:

"Like a ship whose captain is in deep fright,
Its mast broken, the knots of sail loosened
And hang awry, its deck splintered all over,
The torn sail swishing, it tosses helpless
All over the sea with no sense of course
Caught as it is in a grim tornado,
The royal elephant *Kalavegan*
Was in rut, the attendants were helpless,
The mahout nowhere; it deterred the blood
That flowed from a facial wound, and traversed
Like a blue mountain walking on the earth,
The King's Way the main road, the shopping street,
Spreading confusion in *Pukar* city
All over its twin divisions of land,
Not keeping to a course, nor taking rest,
As the keeper, the drummer, birds of prey
And helpless citizens set up a din."⁸

High among the virtues advocated by *Manimekalai* is feeding the hungry. Saving a living being from the pangs of hunger is considered a *tapas* and *Manimekalai* is referred to by such sobriquets as the Doctor of Dear Life (*Aruyir Maruthuvi*) and the Maid Who Ended the Disease of Hunger (*Pasippini Teertha Pavai*). With *Aaputhran* and *Manimekalai* as exemplars, *Sathanar* makes use of every chance to underline this virtue. Thus *Dipatilakai* to *Manimekalai* when the latter receives the *Amuda Surabhi* and takes to a life of charity:

"Charity to people who can pay back
Is mere trade: the lives of only those
Who save the helpless from hunger, are blessed.
They who give nourishment to living beings
In this world, give precious life itself.
You have taken the vow of saving lives.
Surely a peerless *dharmaic* path!"⁹

Manimekalai also praises other important virtues like chastity and compassion through the re-telling of the life-histories of *Aadirai* and *Sutamati*. Animal sacrifice is frowned at through the story of *Aaputhran*. The *Buddhist* ideals of non-violence, equality and renunciation are stressed at the appropriate places.

The epic is really a treasure-trove for historians and sociologists for its action takes place in all the major divisions of Tamil Nadu: *Chola* (*Pukar*), *Chera* (*Vanji*) and *Pandya* (*Maturai*) as also in *Kanchi*, a vice-royalty of the *Cholas*. Scholars like V.Kanakasabhai, U.V.Swaminatha Iyer, S.Krishnaswamy Iyengar and Mu.Raghava Iyengar have admirably reconstructed the political and social life of the ancient Tamils with the help of this epic. Heavy dependence upon *Manimekalai* by historians may be seen in passages such as this that connects India and Sri Lanka:

"Ceylon was known as *Lankadvipa* or *Ratna-dvipa*: the highest mountain in the island was *Samanoli* (Now called Adam's peak); and on its summit was an impression of *Buddha's* foot, which was an object of pilgrimage to *Buddhists* far and near. Between Ceylon and India was the island *Manipallavam*, on which there was one of the sacred seats of *Buddha*, then held in great veneration by all *Buddhists*. It is said to have been at a distance of thirty *yojanas* south of *Pukar*, the ancient sea-port at the mouth of the *Kaveri*. A ship sailing from the coast of *Matura* to *Chavakam* (Java) touched at *Manipallavam*. To the east of Ceylon were the islands inhabited by a race of *Nagas* called *Nakkasaranar* or naked *Nomadas*, who were cannibals. Beyond these island was *Chavakam*, a large kingdom the capital of which was *Nagapuram*. The king of this country claimed to be a descendant of the God *Indra*, and what is most remarkable, the language spoken in *Chavakam* appears to have been Tamil! This *Chavakam* was most probably Sumatra or Java."¹⁰

It will be seen that almost the entire matter has been woven out of the information contained in the Tamil epic.

Manimekalai occupies a very high place in Tamil literature. It exhibits a purposive imagination, poetic exuberance, an appreciation of the sublime, the good and the beautiful, high capability in characterisation, a thorough knowledge of the workings of the human heart (for instance, the contrastive reactions of maternal fondness and paternal sternness when *Udayakumaran's*

death is conveyed to the Queen and the King), and a ready sympathy with the suffering millions. Not a religious tract, but a poem to uphold *Karuna*, the compassion of the *Buddha*:

Hard it is to understand: By giving away our food, we get more strength, by bestowing cloth on others, we gain more beauty; by founding abodes of purity and truth, we acquire great treasures.

There is a proper time and a proper mode in charity; just as the vigorous warrior goes to battle, so is the man who is able to give. He is like an able warrior, a champion strong and wise in action.

Loving and compassionate he gives with reverence and banishes all hatred, envy, and anger."¹¹

4. The Characters

1. *Manimekalai*

Manimekalai the heroine of the epic, is purity and compassion incarnate. She shines with a rare glow, like a flame of pure light, in Tamil literature. At the very outset of the epic her mother *Madhavi* assures *Vasanthamalai* that her daughter would never become a courtesan. The unnatural death of *Kovalan* had led her to the Sage *Aravana* and the nunnery. She would see to it that *Manimekalai* also renounced the world. *Madhavi*'s advice and *Manimekalai*'s acceptance of it did not please the citizens of *Pukar*. To cast within the grey portals of a nun's life this embodiment of beauty and artistic excellence! But *Manimekalai* prefers to follow the footsteps of her mother. She has faith in the *Buddhistic* ideal of renunciation and is protected by an unwavering will. As *Sutamati* tells the Prince:

"Though you are like *Muruga* who destroyed
The Mountain-ogre, she will not see you;
Deep is her penance gathered through deeds in
Previous births: she has power to damn.
Not for her the lure of carnal desire."¹²

But then, *Manimekalai* is no superhuman being incapable of ordinary emotions. She is very much human. She is a fond daughter, full of spotless, filial affection. While listening to the story of *Kovalan*'s murder, tears stain her cheeks. Surely this is not the first time she hears of the tragedy. But the memories are too poignant for the gentle daughter. When she wakes up all alone in the *Manipallavam* island, her prime worry is about her mother. The night is gone. *Madhavi* will worry!

Nor is she a stranger to the stirrings of love in a youthful heart. *Sathanar* sees to it that it is *Manimekalai* and not *Madhavi* who decides about

her renunciation. This is beautifully brought out in the dramatic canto: 'The Manifestation of Goddess *Manimekalā*.' *Manimekalā* is hidden within the crystal room. Outside the room, *Sutamati* speaks to *Udayakumaran* on the vanity of human wishes and the impermanence of the human body. The Prince is vain and insinuates that a courtesan's daughter is easy game. After he speaks this and goes away, *Manimekalā* comes out. Her ears have heard, her heart has been a battlefield, and now she has overcome *Mara's* assault. Her words are dipped in fire, as she recognises her own weakness:

"In words censorious he spoke of me
As unchaste, with no penance, unguarded.
A woman for sale, and would possess me.
Yet my mind followed the stranger's footsteps.
Mother! Is this the nature of desire?
If so, may it be destroyed for ever!"¹³

This is *Manimekalā's* moment of spiritual victory. But *Sathanar* comes back again to this feat of renunciation, perhaps to underline the unique heroism needed of a young, helpless girl to sustain her solemn resolve. *Udayakumaran* lies killed and she gazes upon the body which had in an earlier birth been that of her husband *Rahulan*. Her human feelings come to the fore again, and she laments bitterly that a life of promise has thus been abruptly ended. At this moment of uncertainty, the pillar-statue (*Kandir-p-pavai*) gives her proper guidance. The lingering residue of the ordinary egoistic human consciousness -- *me, for me, my lover* -- is burnt up at last. She now rises, carrying within her the universal *metta bhavana*. She is no more unsure of herself or in doubt about her present and future. This "strength, the silence of the gods" within her helps her to withstand the machinations of the Queen and even effect a complete transformation of the royal heart.

But *Manimekalā* does not withdraw from the field of action. She is no distant, unattainable vision, but a mortal like her fellow beings when she perseveres in her mission. Thanks to her healing touch, prisons and dungeons become places of worship and good works. Even the birds and animals come within the circle of her loving kindness. This is the *Buddhist* ideal of *metta bhavana* that makes one identify oneself with all creation and thereby helps all living things.

"Love (*metta*), Compassion (*karuna*), Sympathetic Joy (*mudita*) and Equanimity (*upekkha*) towards all beings are the four sublime Abodes wherein the monk is admonished constantly to dwell. The fanning of the cold embers and grey ashes of the heart until, by degrees, the coals of affection smouldering beneath are blown first into a fiery blaze, then into a white-hot incandescence of love that radiates far and wide a beneficent spiritual heat, is not only enumerated but also

to be practised first. Without Love, Compassion will turn to contempt, Sympathetic Joy to vicarious satisfaction, and Equanimity to heartless indifference. The texts therefore invariably describe first the cultivation of Love..."¹⁴

By describing *Manimekalai* as "the maid who cured the disease of hunger," *Sathanar* makes her the ideal image of compassion visualised by all religions. What is compassion? It is simply the inability to remain unconcerned when a fellow-being is suffering from hunger. Indeed, what is the use of our discussions of philosophy, our worship of images and our devotional exercises, if we ignore the hungry poor?

Sathanar has envisioned *Manimekalai* as human like ourselves but divine in her soulful compassion. As we see her through the epic action, we are increasingly drawn to her gentle and meaningful words of wisdom and love to the other characters and also to her humility before elders. Besides, her anxiety to transform the world into a place of calm and contentment reveals the spiritual dimensions in her character and compels our homage.

"All in her pointed to a noble kind.
Near to earth's wideness, intimate with heaven,
Exalted and swift her young large-visioned spirit
Voyaging through worlds of splendour and of calm
Overflow the ways of Thought to unborn things.
Ardent was her self-poised unstumbling will;
Her mind, a sea of white sincerity,
Passionate in flow, had not one turbid wave."¹⁵

2. *Aaputhran*

Along with *Manimekalai*, *Aaputhran* engages our major attention in the epic. He is a tragic hero who touches the deepest chords of our emotional being. His birth to *Salī* out of wedlock is held up against him when he takes his first step towards service to living beings. If his birth prevented him from putting to practice what he thought was right, his poverty prevented him from doing good works to his heart's satisfaction. However, his single-pointed determination to do charity and his heart's sorrow at being thwarted in his life's mission compelled the admiration of Goddess *Chinta Devi*. She gave him the *Amuda Surabhi*. Thus the divine vessel which is the moving force behind the epic's progression was brought to earth for the first time by *Aaputhran*. He received the priceless gift with humility and dedicated himself whole-heartedly to the task of bringing succour to the needy. His success was overwhelming and a time came when success itself became the cause of his tragedy. When *Indra* comes to *Aaputhran* and offers him boons in the characteristic manner of the gods, *Aaputhran*, for the nonce swayed by self-righteousness, rejects the god's friendly gesture:

"My divine vessel can remove hunger
And bring joy to pain-wracked visages.
What else will the Lord of gods give me --
Food to eat and clothes to wear, or maidens
Or anyone else to guard me safe?"¹⁶

Indra's reaction makes *Aaputhran* jobless in *Maturai*. Undaunted, he journeys to *Savakam* but is trapped alone in *Manipallavam*. He prefers to die rather than make use of the nectar-vessel to produce food for his consumption. His one-pointed idealism leads to his death in the deserted isle.

Aaputhran is a symbol of pure compassion. *Sathanar* has not brought in any romantic element to disturb the image. *Aaputhran* is made the mouth-piece of some of the most important social criticism in the epic. His growing up into a learned and good person itself proves that birth can never be an impediment to one's acquiring knowledge, and that all men are born equal. The caste distinctions are but man-made. Were not *Vasistha* and *Agastya* born to the courtesan, *Tilottama*? Why, the *Puranas* speak of great saints who have been nurtured by animals!

"*Achala* was a cow's son; *Sringi*, a deer's;
A tiger's offspring, *Virinchi*; was not
Famous *Kesakambala* a jackal's son?
When you give plentiful praise to these saints
As the progenitors of your caste,
Where is stain for the caste traced to a cow,
O beings well read in the *Vedas*?"¹⁷

Aaputhran's criticism of animal sacrifice is firm, to the point, a gentle lyric of gratitude. How can one have the heart to kill a cow?

"Do not torture others: listen to me.
Grazing in fields set apart from farming
The cow gives sweet and health-increasing milk
With loving kindness to people in this
Wide world from the very day they are born.
What have you against this creature? Tell me,
O brahmins versed in ancient scriptures!"¹⁸

In line with the Indian tradition, *Aaputhran's* tragedy is transformed into a divine comedy when we meet him in his next birth as the good king *Punyarajan*. This king of *Savaka* is an image of humility and gentleness. He is taken aback and saddened to know of his lowly birth and how he is but a foundling. So strong is his reaction that he even wants to abdicate. However, he is dissuaded by his minister and he also realises the true *Budhist* ideal which is in not running away from life but remaining a part

of it and doing good to mankind. What arrangement can be superior to the good of the people than having a benevolent king? So *Manimekalai* tells him:

....."What ails you who wears garlands?
I came to your country to invite you here
Only to make you fully aware
Of your past, and make your name known
In these small and large islands. When the kings
Of the earth take to a life of *dharma*,
What better way to save the world from evil?
If you ask what is *dharma*, hear this.
Forget not! No greater good deed is there
Than to give mankind food, clothes and shelter!"¹⁹

Aaputhran is *Sathanar*'s attempt to portray the *Bodhisattva* ideal in all its crystalline purity and universal significance.

3. *Udayakumaran*

Though *Udayakumaran* has not much of a role in the epic, his presence is seminal to the plot. *Sathanar* takes great care in delineating his character. He is an ideal Prince, noble-looking like the God *Subramania* and totally fearless. He walks into the epic immediately after having brought under control the royal elephant *Kalavegan* which had run amok causing widespread destruction in *Pukar*'s principal roads. His love for *Manimekalai* has society's sanction, for in those days royalty was not circumscribed from having relationship with courtesans. The courtesan of ancient India was a cultured person, well-versed in the fine arts and was considered an ornamental part of the royal retinue. *Manimekalai*'s grandmother, *Chitrapati*, traces her lineage from heavenly dancers like *Rambha* and *Tilottama*. She eggs on *Udayakumaran* to consider *Manimekalai* as his right. In fact, he is abashed by the dream in which Goddess *Manimekala* advises him to abandon his designs upon the maid. However, when *Chitrapati* is incensed by *Manimekalai* going around in the public with a begging bowl, she goes straight to the Prince and tells him to pluck the flower that is in full bloom.

It is Doom that has come to *Udayakumaran* in the person of *Chitrapati*. He goes to the Town Hall where he converses with *Manimekalai*. She is slightly upset because she knows the Prince had been her husband *Rahulan* in a previous birth. Armed with tremendous self-control, she does not betray her feelings. Instead, she speaks words of wisdom in all humility. This physical body is bound to birth, ageing, sickness and death. Indeed, a vessel for sorrows. Why should he pursue it? She hides herself in *Kayachantikai*'s form. This only inflames his desire. He returns to the Hall later, determined to take her away by force:

..... "Even should
 The wise criticise or the King get angry
 I shall seize that girl with lovely tresses
 When she comes out of the Assembly Hall,
 And place her on my golden chariot.
 It will then be time enough to listen
 To her learning, and old words of wisdom."²⁰

As irony would have it, *Kanchanan* mistakes *Manimekalai* for his beloved. To avoid the *Vidhyadhara's* attentions, *Manimekalai* goes to *Udayakumaran* and engages him in talk that is meant to create *asubha bhavana* in the listener for things worldly. Having recognised *Manimekalai*, the Prince mistakes her intentions. Is she trying to scare him away so that she can join the *Vidhyadhara*? Doom-impelled, *Udayakumaran* returns at night to the Hall like a man entering an ant-hole in which a poisonous cobra is hidden. The cobra is *Kanchanan*. He cuts down the Prince mercilessly.

When *Sathanar* links the Prince with his earlier birth as *Rahulan* we have an interesting opportunity to study the character. To prove the irrevocable decree of *karma*, *Sathanar* makes the Prince a victim of *Kanchanan's* accidental judgement leading to the casual slaughter. It was an accidental judgement that had made *Rahulan* cut down an innocent cook who had stumbled when *Rahulan* spread a royal feast to the Sage *Brahmadatta*.

"Persons who say 'god will save the devotees
 From results of sinful actions' are fools.
 Even if due to love of righteousness
 An evil is done, fate will not be denied.
 When fate does catch up, that life will suffer.
 The same life, should it perform wholesome deeds
 Could also attain release from all births."²¹

Except for this lack of self-control when faced by anger, *Rahulan* and the Prince are alike in every way. But while *Rahulan* is shown as the happy husband of *Lakshmi* (*Manimekalai* in her earlier birth), such joy of union is denied to Prince *Udayakumaran* partly because *Manimekalai* is no Princess and partly because she prefers to enter the nunnery under the strong influence of her mother, *Madhavi*. *Udayakumaran's* story might have been different if *Manimekalai* had been able to turn him away from mere lustful thoughts to a spiritual way of life as indicated by the earlier birth when *Lakshmi* had successfully taught *Rahulan* the need for humility and together they had fed the Sage *Sadhuchakra*. As Goddess *Manimekala* assures the maid, this good deed would ensure them divine Grace at some future birth. However, in this birth, *Udayakumaran* dies a tragic death.

4. *Aravana Adigal*

In this epic written to glorify the Buddhist ideal of compassion, the

figure of Saint *Aravana* acquires a special significance. Here is the ideal monk, the *bhikshu*, realised soul who nevertheless moves among the common people helping them with his sage counsel, gentle nature and sweet words. The very first time we hear of him through *Madhavi*, a venerable figure appears before our inner vision. According to *Sathanar*, Saint *Aravana* is "the sinless Sage *Aravana* of spotless wisdom." His words are the quintessence of *Buddhist* philosophy:

"Those who are born are bound to sorrow.
They who escape birth gain eternal joy.
Attachment leads to the former; the latter
Is the gain of the non-attached."²²

From now onwards he appears at the time of an intense spiritual need, when his devotees need right guidance in their life's journey. And each time, something is added to the lovable nobility of his nature. When *Manimekalai* receives the gift of the nectar-vessel, she immediately hastens to Saint *Aravana* along with *Madhavi* and *Sutamati*. He recounts to them their earlier birth and speaks words of wisdom. He is aware that lecturing on ethical and moral precepts is generally of not much use in this world of human affairs. He must have experienced plenty of disappointments in this regard during his long life. And yet he will not give up his duty:

"The vast sheet of ocean-water cannot
Go through the wire-pierced hole in the gem.
But as the tiny droplets of water
Which drip through, it is as yet possible
To gain *dharma* in this world."²³

As for *Manimekalai*, his firm guidance is: "Remove the sickness of hunger!"

"You have received the life-giving vessel,
Valuable *Amuda Surabhi*.
I shall speak to you of the One Law
Which is common to man and gods; that is
'Curing the disease of hunger;' thus spake
The venerable sage in words of wisdom."²⁴

He then tells *Manimekalai* and her mothers the story of *Aaputhran* to underline the importance of this service. Incidentally, he teaches them to abjure the folly of caste distinctions and the pride of power.

Sage *Aravana* appears next in the epic when *Madhavi* seeks his help to get *Manimekalai* released from the Queen's custody. By the time he comes to the palace, the Queen has realised her own folly and recognised *Manimekalai*'s greatness. Sage *Aravana*'s coming brings light into the spiritual darkness that had so far held the palace in its thrall. He blesses them all,

including *Chitrapati*: "May discriminatory understanding be yours!" To the Queen's welcome, he replies that he is now like the setting sun and then gives a clear enunciation of *Buddhist* theology and exhorts all the ladies present to follow *Dharma* so as to reap the result of good deeds.

"By avoiding the ten evils above,
And holding to discipline and charity
They are born among the three best: godheads,
Humans and *Brahmas*: and living as such
They reap the results as an endless bliss."²⁵

Our final meeting with Saint *Aravana* takes place when we see him explaining in detail to *Manimekalai* the subtle points of *Buddhist* doctrines. The scene where the aged monk leads the young nun from darkness to light and from ignorance to knowledge is firmly etched in our hearts as we hear his last words in the epic that light the flame of discrimination:

"It is no outsider who keeps us in
Bondage or release or causes either.
All that we described as above are caused
By desire, anger and illusion.
To snap attachment by recognising
Impermanence, pain, soullessness and dirt;
May your anger cease by good consciousness
Of friendship, compassion and joyful thought.
Give up illusion by reading scriptures,
By meditation, contemplation and
Realisation. Be freed from mental
Darkness by these four!"²⁶

Saint *Aravana* is *Sathanar*'s triumph of realism. The saint belongs to the finest part of India's ancient heritage which is based on self-sacrifice, true knowledge and sterling renunciation. No doubt *Sathanar* was inspired by a living saint, probably his own teacher. In any case Saint *Aravana* is a wonderful image of the ideal monk envisioned by the *Buddha*:

"A preacher must be like a man who in quest of water digs a well in an arid tract of land. So long as he sees that the sand is dry and white, he knows that the water is still far off. But let him not be troubled or give up the task as hopeless. The work of removing the dry sand must be done so that he can dig down deeper into the ground. And often the deeper he has to dig, the cooler and purer and more refreshing will the water be.

When after some time of digging he sees that the sand becomes moist, he accepts it as a foretoken that the water is near.

So long as the people do not listen to the words of truth, the preacher knows that he has to dig deeper into their hearts; but when they begin to heed his words he apprehends that they will soon attain enlightenment."²⁷

Incidentally, this description may be used as a printer to the manner in which we should approach *Manimekalai*. As we dig deeper within the folds of mythology, dramatic action and violent passions, a time comes when the pure spring of *Manimekalai*'s character appears before us. Refreshing, inspiring, elevating. A world where such selfless service and divine compassion are present, is a safe world. All we can do is to bow in humility and gratitude.

5. *Manimekalai* in *Silappadhikaram*

Among the references to the story of *Manimekalai* in the epic *Silappadhikaram*, three passages stand out for our approach. The first of these occurs when *Kovalan*, *Kannaki* and the nun *Kavunti* tarry in the outskirts of *Maturai* city. *Matalan* of *Kaveri-p-poompattinam* who is passing by, spends sometime talking to the travellers about the recent past and touches upon the birth of *Manimekalai*:

"Far-famed by receiving royal honours,
The gold-complexioned *Madhavi* gave birth
To a sweet little babe: when the days of
Confinement were over, the ancient
Ageing courtesans decided:
'Let us give a lovely name to the babe
Born to *Madhavi*.' You were there then
And heard these words that were pleasure-giving
And you said: 'Long ago an ancestor of mine
Was ship-wrecked in mid-ocean.
As he had performed charity in earlier lives
He managed to swim and keep alive.
A goddess appeared before him and said:
I live here by *Indra*'s orders.
I am *Manimekala*. 'Do not worry.
As the good results of your earlier charities
Your sorrows would cease, and you would escape
This ocean of sorrow. She took him in the air
And placed him on the beach. Name the baby
After the goddess who saved my ancestor.'
A thousand maids wearing jewelled belts
Blessed the child as *Manimekalai*.
On that day, along with auspicious *Madhavi*
You gave away a shower of gold."

Towards the close of the epic, we see the Chera King *Senguttuvan* returning victorious after his battles in the North and preparing to initiate *Kannaki* worship. *Matalan* comes to him and tells him of what happened at *Pukar* after the *Maturai* tragedy.

"Hearing of the tragic events, the good *Madhavi*
Said to her mother: 'I shan't wear jewels any more.
Do not allow *Manimekalai* to enter
The lowly profession of a courtesan.'
She shed her flower-bedecked tresses,
Performed *Buddhist* charity
And became a nun engaged in *dharmic* acts."

The last canto of *Silappadhikaram* opens with an account of *Manimekalai*'s renunciation. *Senguttuvan* has installed the image of *Kannaki* in a temple and worship has begun. *Senguttuvan* desires to know about *Manimekalai* and *Kannaki*'s friend *Devanthi* speaks of the renunciation of *Manimekalai* who was indeed the loveliest among the jewelled courtesans of *Kaveri-poompattinam*.

"*Madhavi*'s mother unveiled her thoughts.
'*Manimekalai*'s tresses are now dark
And have reached the apex of youth's gloss.
The red streaked lovely eyes of the girl
Have received the wine of dissembling.
Innocent seems the gentle smile
That unbars a splash of corals
To reveal a line of shiny pearls.
The breasts have risen with pride.
Pale, the figure is ready for hugging.
The waist is all movement.
Again, her hips are spreading.
The thighs are attractively healthy.
Her tiny feet rejecting lacquer
Are like fresh shoots dipped in ghee.
The dance-master makes no progress.
Indeed, he is far behind in lessons.
If things continue like this,
The pillars of our society will not
Accept *Manimekalai* as their danseuse.
What is your opinion?'
'Come, my little one, *Manimekalai*!'
So called out *Madhavi* and took the girl
With her. She removed the flower-bedecked
Tresses of *Manimekalai*, forcing Cupid
To throw away his bow and arrows in despair.
Performing charity, she made her daughter a nun.

The King and the citizens of *Pukar*
 Were saddened by *Manimekalai's* renunciation
 As if they had lost a jewel in the deep sea.
 The righteous Saint *Aravana* assured them
 That the maid had told him of the act.
 Even though she was too young to renounce,
 She gave up her *Lakshmi*-like image,
 Saddening me beyond words'
 Said *Devanthi* to the *Chera* King."

FOOT NOTES

1. *Silappadhikaram*, Padikam, u. 54-60.
2. *Buddhism as Expounded in Manimekalai* (1978), p.58.
3. (XIX, ll. 57-74).
4. XXIII, ll. 73-79.
5. *Boudhamum Thamizhum* (1980), p. 136.
6. II, ll. 64-67.
7. IV, ll. 113-121.
8. IV, ll. 26-42.
9. XI, ll. 92-98.
10. V.Kanakasabhai, *Tamils Eighteen Hundred Years Ago* (1966), p. 11.
11. *The Gospel of Buddha* (1987), p.63.
12. IV, ll. 13-17.
13. V, ll. 88-93.
14. Bhikshu Sangharakshita, *A Survey of Buddhism* (1976), p. 159.
15. Sri Aurobindo, *Savitri* (1954), p. 18.
16. XIV, ll. 44-48.
17. XIII, ll. 63-69.

18. XIII, 11. 49-56.
19. XXV, 11. 222-231.
20. XX, 11. 13-19.
21. XXI, 11. 63-69.
22. II, 11. 64-67.
23. XII, 11. 65-69.
24. XII, 11. 114-119.
25. XXIV, 11. 136-140.
26. XXX, 11. 250-261.
27. *The Gospel of Buddha* (Told by Paul Carus, 1987), p. 109.

Introduction

Rivalling the sun at dawn in the lightning sheen
Of her glowing form and flowing tresses
Is the goddess on the Golden Hill crest.
Hearkening to Mother Earth's tale of woe
She stood beneath the *jamun* tree doing
Austerities to destroy the Enemy,
And then went South to found *Sambapathi*.
Kaantan, the worthy scion of the Sun
Dynasty, questing for water for his land
Prayed to the immortal *Agastya* who
Overturned his pot and made *Kaveri* flow
Due East reaching fast *Sambapathi*
And merge grandly with the ocean close-by.
The goddess of immense austerities
Rose to welcome the flowing holiness:
"Beloved! *Ganga* of the skies above!
Quencher-light of this land's water-thirst! Come!"
On this the Sage who followed *Kaveri* said:
"Mother! This lady of enriched *tapas*
Deserves your obeisance. Bow unto her."
The maid of *Bharat* land which is praised
In great poetry, child of the righteous *Chola* kings,
The goddess of *Tamil* who never fails
Even should the *Zodiac* trip to cause a long summer;
Kaveri bowed to *Samba* divine; She,

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Delighted, spoke, sitting in lotus pose:
 "While forming the six-fold world of gods
 And worlds of the four directions, *Brahma*
 Gave my name to this city now ancient.
 I rename it after you. May you prosper!"
 The announcement came of the festival
 To the God of hundred sacrifices
 In this dread city famed by the twin names;
Chitrapati sent a message, to *Madhavi*
 Through *Vasanthamalai* when rumours buzzed;
Manimekalai entered the lovely garden
 To gather blossoms for *Buddha's* worship;
 She sought the marble room's privacy
 When she found the Prince coming towards her;
 The appearance of goddess *Manimekalai* there
 When the Prince who had by then seen, the maid
 And grown desire-filled, had gone away;
 She took the maid to *Manipallava* isle;
 Returning to the garden, the goddess
 Famed far and wide, woke up *Sutamati*,
 In the distant island the virgin pure
 Also woke up and sorrowed at her lonely state;
 Perceiving a shining gem-studded Seat
 She adored it and learnt of her past lives;
 The wondrous goddess then returned and removed
 The maid's worry and taught her three *mantras*.
 There came then the deity *Dipatilakai*
 And gave the lovely girl a divine vessel;
 With the vessel she joined her mothers
 To pay homage to *Aravana*, the austere;
 Sage *Aravana* recounted to her
 The inspiring story of *Aaputhran*;
 Of how *Chinta Devi* gave the vessel
 In her hand to *Aaputhran* in the past;
 In search of beginning its ministry
 The maid carried the vessel to the street;
 Into the pot held forth by the lovely maid
 A woman of chaste character placed food;
 The damsel cured *Kayachantikai* of her
 Constant hunger and went to the Town Hall;

On learning of her presence in the Hall
 The Prince, decked with fresh garlands, went there.
 To escape the Prince's advances
 She changed into a *Vidhyadhara* form,
 Proceeded to the royal prison house
 And made it a mansion of righteousness;
 As the Prince would still not give up the pursuit,
Kanchana, the husband of *Kayachantikai*,
 Stabbed fatally the son of the King;
 The maid lamented the Prince's sad end
 And was comforted by the divine voice;
 The King of the land imprisoned the girl
 And later released her from confinement;
 The virgin spoke to the Queen of *Dharma*,
 Then went to the land ruled by *Aaputhran*.
 With him the maid lovely in her jewels,
 Proceeded to the isle of *Manipallavam*;
 Returning to her motherland *Vanji*
 In the garb of an ascetic, the maid
 Went to various sectarian masters
 Asking for the essence of their teaching;
 Again, she went to *Kanchi* town to meet
 Her mothers and also peerless *Aravana*;
 Removing the false garb, the virgin joyed
 To bow to her mothers and *Aravana*;
 Putting on a nun's vestments, she listened
 To the Way and took to austerities
 For overcoming the ills of mortal birth.
 Such is the tale told to Prince *Rango*
 By the able *Koolavanikan Sathan*:
 Composed in thirty cantos he entitled it
 The Renunciation of *Marimekalai*
 And this brought glory to the Tamil world.

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Line 3. Goddess : Goddess Sombapathi

Golden Hill : Meru Mountain

- Line 5. jamun : Jambu in Sanskrit, this rose apple tree is said to have been abundant in one of the seven continents surrounding the mountain Meru, and hence the continent was named Jambudvīpa or Jambu-khanda.
- Line 7. Sambapathi : Named after the presiding deity, Sambapathi is said to have been the original name of Kaveri-poom-pattinam (Pukar) which seems to have gone under the sea.
- Line 8. Kaantan : A Chola King
- Line 10. Agastya : One of the Seven Sages, Agastya was born out of the sacrificial pot of Brahma. He is closely associated with early Tamil civilization. He married the Vidharbha Princess, Lopamudra. Agastya appears to have authored the first book of Tamil grammar, Agathiyam which is now lost. Trina Dhoomagni, the author of Tolkappiyam is referred to as a prominent student of Agastya.
- Line 14. Refers to Goddess Sambapathi
- Line 18. Sage : Agastya
- Lines 21-24 The reference is to the river Kaveri.
- Line 25. She : Goddess Sambapathi
- Line 27. six-fold world of Gods : According to Buddhist cosmology : these six are Maharajika, Trayatrimsa, Yama, Tushita, Nirmanarati and Paranirmita Vasavarthi worlds.

- Line 28. worlds of the four directions : These in the Buddhist cosmology are twenty in number and are Brahma-kayika, Brahmapurohita, Mahabrahma, Pareethapa, Abrahmanapa, Apasvara, Pareethasubha, Abrahmanasubha, Subhakraisha, Brahatpala, Asamgyasat, Appraka, Atapa, Sudarasana, Sudarsi, Akenishta, Akasanantayayatana, Vijnananantayayatana, Akinchanyayatana and Naiva Samgyayatana worlds.
- Line 30. Renamed as Kaveri-p-poompattinam (Pukar) or The sea-side city of Kaveri.
- Line 32. God of hundred sacrifices : Indra
- Line 33. Twin names : Sambapathi, Kaveri-p-poompattinam
Dread city : which strikes terror in the enemy's heart.
- Line 34. Chitrapati : grand-mother of Manimekalai
Madhavi : Mother of Manimekalai
- Line 39. Prince : Udayakumaran
- Line 40. goddess Manimekalai : the family deity of Manimekalai's father Kovalan.
- Line 43. She : Goddess Manimekala
- Line 45. Sutamati : Manimekalai's foster-mother
- Line 46. virgin pure : Manimekalai
- Line 50. wondrous goddess : Goddess Manimekala.

- Line 51. three mantras : The incantations would give the ability
 to change one's form, to fly in the
 air and to remain free from hunger.
- Line 54. mothers : Madhavi and Sutamati.
- Line 61. the maid : Manimekalai
- Line 63. A woman of
 pure character : Aadirai.
- Line 64. Kayachantikai : A Vidhyadhara damsel
- Line 69. Vidhyadhara : a celestial denizen
- Line 81. him : the present ruler of Savaka which
 was ruled by Aaputhran at an earlier
 time.
- Line 89. false garb : the garb of an ascetic Manimekalai
 had assumed.
- Line 94. Prince Ilango : author of Cilappatikaram.

1. The Announcement of the Festival

(In ancient times, the Chola King Thodi-thol Sembiyan, commanded by Sage Agastya, went to Indra with a request: "You must remain in our city during the twenty-eight days of the festival we celebrate in your honour." Indra agreed. The elders of the city like religious heads, astrologers and merchants, came to the reigning king Killivalavan and asked him to arrange the annual festival since a failure to celebrate the festival would invite the wrath of the guardian daemons of the city. Accordingly, the big drum of the temple was placed on an elephant, and taken through the main streets of Kaveri-p-poompattinam by divisions of infantry and cavalry. The public-crier beat the drum announcing the festival and called upon the citizens to beautify the environs. The successful celebration of the festival would ensure the health of body and mind; hatred would flee the land).

Bidden by the Sage of the Potikai hills
To further the fame of the prime city
Whose people never stray from traditions,
Sembiyan, destroyer of sky-high forts,
Stood in Indra's presence, all respect:
"Dwell in my capital city on earth
During the twenty-eight days of festival
Which even the gods above love to watch."
The Lord of the Immortals assented.
Since wise citizens will not let it lapse,
Sectarian chiefs who speak of scriptures,
Ethics, philosophy and Attainment
And themselves practise the precepts well,
Expert astrologers, divine beings
Who prefer to go about in human guise,
Merchants from countries of different speech,
The Cabinet of Five, the Group of Eight,
Gathered and said: "Should we ignore the festival.
The shopping-complex daemon that relieved our King

Of pain in heavens would sure cause distress 20
 Thundering, baring its violent teeth
 With russet mouth agape; inimical
 Would the daemon of the Square act to all
 Which hitherto but killed the evil ones
 With its noose; announce the festivities
 That bring together kings from all over the earth!"
 The scented drum in the Thunderbolt Temple
 Was placed on the back of an elephant.
 The traditional drummer with a stick beat
 The drum wrought of bull's hide, whose thunder 30
 Summoned death with its desire for blood.
 He announced: "Long live our city ancient!
 May the rains fall in plenty! May our King
 Be benevolent, holding to the right path!
 Our elders knew for certain that when
 This auspicious jubilee is held to
 Honour our island, *Indra*, his four-fold
 Gods, and the Eighteen godheads
 Famed for their special propitiating grace
 Come here leaving the heavens forlorn 40
 As this city was when King *Karikala*
 Went northwards in search of new victories.
 Place brimful pots, golden cups of fresh grain shoots,
 Ornamented lamps and other symbols
 In our festooned streets and blemishless thresholds;
 Adorn spaces with rows of areca palms,
 Plantains, golden creepers and sugarcane;
 Hang artistically-threaded pearl strings
 On golden pillars lining the pials.
 Remove old sand from celebration-ready 50
 Roads and halls; spread new sand everywhere.
 Drape banners in strings and on bamboo poles
 High-waving on terraces and house-fronts!
 Celebrate each god's festival in a
 Grand scale according to custom to suit
 The respective modes in temples from that
 Of Siva to the Daemon of the Square!
 Those of you who can lecture on wise maxims
 Enter the cool tents and shaded Town Halls!

Others who can argue the merits of
Various sects, ascend the appropriate seats.
Should there be inflamed enemies avoid
Raging confrontation and go away.
Have you followed me? Act thus in these days
Twenty-eight, when gods mingle with humans
Here on white sands, flowering groves, cool
River-banks, and tree-lined lakes at the fete."
Accompanied by sword-wielding soldiers,
Chariots, horses and elephants, he
Sounded the drum: "May hunger disease and hate
Cease. May rains and prosperity increase!"
Thus he proclaimed the festival in the city.

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- Line 1. The Sage of
Potikai hills : Agastya
- Line 2. Prime city : Kaveri-p-poompattinam
- Line 4. Sembiyan : A Chola King
- Line 10. it : The Festival for Indra
- Line 11. Sectarian chiefs : Religious heads who could expertly
: expound their philosophical systems
such as Veda-based theology, Ajivaka
vada, Nigrantha, Sankhya, Vaisheshika,
and Bhuta vada.
- Line 17. Cabinet of Five : The Council consisting of Ministers,
: Brahmins, Military Commanders, Ambassadors and Spies which helped the
King with administrative matters.
- Group of Eight : The royal attendants consisting of
"perfumers, garland-makers, betel-bearers,
arecanut servers, armourers,
dressing valets, torch or light-bearers

and body-guards" (V.Kanakasabhai).

Line 19-20 The Daemon that taught a chant to King Muchukunda to relieve him from the darkness that had affected his vision and mind when the rakshasas were battling with him.

Lines 22-25 The guardian-daemon of the city square who held sway at the cross-roads.

Line 27. The Vajra-k-kottam where Indra's Thunderbolt was worshipped.

Line 37. Four-fold gods : Vasus (8), Divakaras (12), Rudras (11) and Maruts (2).

Line 41. King Karakala : A Chola King of the first century A.D. who is said to have led his victorious army upto the Himalayas. He was also a far-sighted administrator who encouraged industries, built tanks and patronised poets and scholars.

2. A Web of Rumours

(On the opening day of the festival, the citizens miss the presence of *Pukar's* famous dancers, *Madhavi* and *Manimekalai*. *Madhavi's* mother *Chitrapati* hears of rumours that criticise the dancing girls for non-participation. She sends *Madhavi's* friend *Vasanthamalai* to persuade the former to take part in the festivities. *Vasanthamalai* speaks of the superb attainments of *Madhavi* in the world of art. Must all this be wasted because of *Madhavi's* renunciation? But *Madhavi* is firm. Her preceptor *Aravana Adigal* has shown her the path of light. Neither she nor *Manimekalai* would ever return to the life of a court danseuse. *Vasanthamalai* retraces her steps in sorrow).

The first day of the *Indra* festival
 Held in the great island of *Jambu* tree
 By the guardian deity, now began;
 The absence of *Manimekalai* and
Madhavi was felt with rising distress
 By *Chitrapati*; deeply sorrowing
 She called out to her lovely daughter's friend
Vasanthamalai; "Go to her and speak
 Of the rumours buzzed by the common man."
Vasanthamalai too had been oppressed
 By *Madhavi's* renunciation; hence
 She hastened to *Madhavi* in the Hall
 Where flowers are strung for *Buddha's* worship.
 Grieving in heart at the frail form of her
 Who once was all softness and bejewelled,
 She said: "Goddess-like maid! Hear why I came.
 What ill-will have you against this city?
 You have excelled in arts meant for kings
 And commoners; in music and rhythm,
 The song-varieties of lute and dance,
 Skilled in striking the drum and blowing the flute,
 In playing the ball and cooking tasty food,
 Preparing scented powders and bathing,
 Decorating the bed and proper disport,

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In excercises and understanding,
 Appropriate speech and self-effacement,
 In penmanship and stringing blossoms fresh,
 In the art of dress and threading pearls,
 Knowledge of Time and other arts many;
 And a deep study of the books on dance
 With visual aids had been yours too,

30

O golden maid with faultless knowledge!
 It is not for such as you to renounce
 The world, say the elders of this city
 And the common people with one voice.
 We do not like such words. It is shameful."

Madhavi said to *Vasanthamalai*:

"Ah! I lost my place of honour in this
 Golden city from the day when
 I clung to life even after learning
 Of the woe that struck my beloved: Shameless me!
 The truly chaste give up their lives in flames
 Of their own sighs rising hot as the fire
 In an active furnace; else, enter the pyre
 As if into a lake of cool waters;
 If they do not enter the blazing fire
 They would then accept a life-long penance
 To join their husbands hereafter.

40

Our lady was not of this kind.
 Unable to accept her husband's woe
 She plucked out her youthful lovely breast
 Covered by cascading tresses and tears
 Flinging which, she caused the fire that burnt
 The famed city; such the noble mother
 To whom *Manimekalai* is daughter;
 Never will she lead an immoral life.
 She will walk always the path of purity.
 Besides, listen to this, O lovely girl!

50

I took refuge in this monastery.
 Bowing at the feet of the sinless sage
 Aravana of spotless wisdom,
 My mind in swoon due to the great sorrow,
 I gave vent to my heart's desolation.
 'Those who are born are bound to sorrow.

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They who escape birth gain eternal joy.
Attachment leads to the former; the latter
Is the gain of the non-attached, he said
And explained the five-fold austerities:
'These the means to overcome your grief.'
Explain all this to our dear friends
And *Chitrapati*, my mother."
Hearing these words *Vasanthamalai*
Grew melancholy at heart like one
Who had lost a priceless jewel in the sea.
Feeling quite helpless, she turned back homewards.

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- Line 3. the guardian
 dety : Sambapathi
- Line 4. absence : absence from the festivities
- Line 5. Madhavi : Manimekalai's mother
- Line 6. Chitrapati : Madhavi's mother
- Line 14. her : Madhavi
- Lines 18-19 'Vettiya' was the dance exhibited exclusively for royalty;
'Poduvial' was for public consumption.
- Line 29. Knowledge of
 Time : astrology
- Line 36. such words : criticism directed against Madhavi.
- Line 41. beloved : Kovalan who was executed by the
 Pandyan King.
- Line 49. our Lady : Kannaki
- Line 54. the famed
 city : Madurai

- Line 55. Madhavi speaks of Manimekalai as Kannaki's own daughter,
as she would have her follow the footsteps of the chaste,
lawfully-wedded wife of Kovalan.
- Line 56. she : Manimekalai
- Line 62. sorrow : Kovalan's death
- Line 68. five-fold The giving up of Lust, Killing, Intoxi-
austerities : cating drinks, Falsehood and Stealing.

3. Entry into the Flower Garden

(*Madhavi's* remembrance of the tragic past brings tears to *Manimekalai's* eyes. The tears fall upon the garlands being prepared by *Manimekalai*. *Madhavi* asks her to gather new flowers as these have become impure. *Sutamati* does not like the idea of *Manimekalai* going out alone. It was during such a festival that she herself had been abducted, despoiled and abandoned. And *Manimekalai* is so lovely! *Sutamati* and *Manimekalai* go out together to the upavana. On their way they see several festival sights. Here is a Jain monk who is teased by a drunkard. A little distance away comes a madman. A hijra is seen dancing in one corner surrounded by an eager crowd. Little children dressed in beautiful ornaments are being taken by their mothers in little chariots as if announcing the commencement of the festival of *Subramanya*. Some of the citizens draw close to *Manimekalai* and express their unhappiness that so much loveliness has been denied to their festivities. *Sutamati* and *Manimekalai* enter the fine garden meant for *Buddha's* worship).

Manimekalai's fate being near
 Even as the scent when the flower
 Is ready to bloom, her soul was aflame
 When she heard of the terrible sorrow
 That had sung her parents as recounted
 By *Madhavi* to *Vasanthamalai*;
 The loving heart of the maid melted
 Sending forth tears that washed away
 The lines of *khol* and fell on the flowers
 Drenching the garlands made of fresh blossoms;
Madhavi looked into the pretty face of
Manimekalai and as a lotus
 Close to the moon wiped the tears with her hands.
 "This sacred garland has lost purity.
 Bring new blooms," she said; *Sutamati* there
 Who was stringing flowers along with her
 Whose tresses had honeyed blossoms on them

Said: "If Cupid should happen to see
 The blue jewel-eyes in the moon-like face
 Of *Manimekalai* stained with tears
 Mourning for the heart-rending events 20
 That had overtaken the noble elders,
 He would be quite overwhelmed by shock.
 If so, can mere men be indifferent?
 Indeed, if they are unmoved, they be eunuchs.
 Besides, O beautiful lady, hearken
 To the reason why I live in this place.
 In *Samba* rich with ocean merchandise
 Where live farmer-merchants, was a brahmin
Kowsika, whose daughter I was born. 30
 Fearless me, of unsuspecting heart,
 I went to a garden to cull flowers.
Marutavega, a *Vidhyadhara*,
 Who was on his way to this city to watch
 The festival celebrations to *Indra*,
 Wearing flower garlands and golden jewels,
 A nobler figure earth had never seen,
 Lifted me to the skies, and flew away.
 There I yielded to his will and lived.
 Later he abandoned me in this city 40
 And went back to his place far away.
 This creeper-like *Manimekalai*
 Cannot go alone to gather flowers.
 The royal garden with water fountains
 Which has green houses of flowering trees
 Is meant for the maids of the King's household;
 In these days of festival to *Indra*
 Who would go there but the gods from above?
 The bees buzzing, the trees will seem to be
 Swaying with garlands that never fade. 50
 Hence they say the Spirit holding the Noose
 Guards the grove; people who know avoid it.
 There is then the garden of *Sampati*
 Where stayed the Bird which lost its wings to Sun's
 heat;
 Also the grove where lived the Sage *Kavera*
 The begetter of river *Kaveri*;

As these places are sentinelled by two
 Pierce old crones, none dares to go therein.
 Another garden which has many trees
 That bloom by the orders of the one Lord
 Whose sterling aim is to guard living things,
 Show them kindness and wrap them with his love,
 Is for us; there you find a marble room
 That is sound-proof: but has transparent walls.
 Within is a brilliant Lotus Seat
 Jewel-studded: if you place buds on it
 They bloom and never fade through the years.
 Nor will any bees disturb their petals.
 One more point to mention, *Madhavi*;
 Should one pray to other gods and offer
 Flowers here, the blooms would move away
 And reach the gods meditated upon.
 If the minds were unattached, the flowers would
 remain.

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Well may you ask: 'Why is it even thus?'
 It was built by *Mayan* in bygone days
 To show through the language of flowers that
 Unlike what the austere ones speak of
 Absence of conation as having effect still,
 This phenomenon favours them who say
Karma follows not where no attachment is.

80

Lady, no other garden but this one
 Is of safest approach to your girl.
 O good one! I shall also now go to
 Pluck flowers there with *Manimekalai*.
 Thus did *Sutamati* walk on the road
 Where chariots move, with the gentle maid.
 Holding a balancing pole with bowls came
 A monk from the sinless *Jina* temple,
 One who had given up abashment and clothes,
 Anxious lest he harm invisible lives.
 He was fasting, and with body all unwashed
 Like a mad elephant. "Come, Sir! I bow
 At thy feet, O Sir! Listen to my words.
 Torture not the life that has entered
 Your body as one condemned in a cell:

90

What was it my Lord spoke of that gives us here,
Beyond and in the end eternal joy?

Where is murder in the wine that flows out
Of the palm spathes? O monk of true penance!
Why not try yoga by drinking this wine?

100

If not pleased, then you could bid me good-bye!"

So a drunkard accosted him and urged

Him to drink as the citizens watched.

His shoulders bound with red oleanders,

A madman came garlanded with cone-shaped

Madar buds, dressed in clothes that were tattered

And were tied here and there with small twigs.

His body was smeared with ash and sandalpaste.

110

He muttered worthless words to those on way,

Crying and falling, screaming and screeching,

Bowing and getting up, reeling around,

Running in circles, rushing to a corner,

And standing up again: duelling with his shadow

At times: people stood sorrowing, watching

The sad antics of this insane person.

Thick tresses stepped with lovely ringlets,

Coral red lips, teeth of white brilliance,

Large russet-lined eyes, earrings of white conch;

Brows like dark creepers, crescent-shaped forehead;

120

Hands like rosy *kantal* blooms, youthful breasts,

A spread of the sides and creeper-thin waist;

Knee-length dress, sandal-painting of the skin:

Attired thus one essayed the eunuch-step

Danced in times of yore by Lord Krishna's son

In Bana's city; some stood viewing him.

In this city full of strangers' voices

Others surveyed the attractive paintings

Done by experts on the white-washed walls high

Of many storeys, who drew likenesses

130

Of all varieties of living things

And also of spotless divinities.

On the festival-happy path, one saw

Children wearing jewelled golden chains

Their tresses pasted with white mustard,

Their top decorated with pearl-strings

Around tresses held together by a clasp:
 From their lips yet in the lisping stage
 Dribbling drops made their guardian strings wet;
 The decorative scarf wound round their waist
 Waved in the breeze with rows of shining gems; 140
 These jewel-weighted toddlers were placed on
 Toy chariots and elephants of gold
 By ladies who cried: "Come hither and see
 The beginning of the festival
 Dedicated to *Subramania*!"
 Many surrounded *Manimekalai*
 Like the shouting mob of *Virata* city
 Which had gathered around the eunuch, *Arjuna*.
 They spoke in pain: "The mother who consigned
 Such beauty to dreadful austerities 150
 Is cruel; nor maternal in her love.
 Should this maid go in for culling blooms
 Shall not the lovely swans withdraw in shame?
 Can they vie with her superior gait?
 Should the peacocks come near her, it were
 To learn from this maid her excellent poise.
 The lisp of the parrots can never be
 As sweet as hers: where is her equal?"
 Bottle-flowers, saffron, lime, laburnum,
Tilak, *Vakul*, scarlet-stalked *ixora*, 160
 Bitter orange, gamboge, many-branched mastwood,
Pitava, jasmine, crooked-thorned screw-pine,
Kutaja, bamboo, thick-trunked *Asoka*,
Cherunti, the kino, massive *Champak*,
 Fiery-blossomed silk-cotton; the blooms
 Of these spread like an extended painting
 By an expert artist making the grove
 Unequaled: her rose-red feet gently treading
 The earth, *Manimekalai*, escorted
 By *Sutamati*, bowed at the entrance 170
 And went inside to gather fresh flowers.

which literally means "the showing up of the cause." This is one of the stages in the spiritual progress of the Buddhist disciple, and points to the time when the actions performed in the past bring forth their consequences.

"The statement of Madhavi to Vasanthamalai, her companion regarding the pathetic death of Kovalan, was the motive force for the decision of renouncing the worldly life on the part of her daughter, Manimekalai. That is to say the proper time had come for Manimekalai to reap the fruits of her good deeds in the past birth. This law of cause and effect that operated in the life of Manimekalai is compared to a fine flower which, when only proper time comes smells sweet."

-N.Balusamy, Studies in Manimekalai, p.75.

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|----------|--------------|---|
| Line 9. | khol | : eye shadow |
| Line 10. | lotus | : Madhavi's hand |
| Line 13. | moon | : Manimekalai's face |
| Line 15. | Sutamati | : Madhavi's companion |
| Line 16. | hez | : Manimekalai |
| Line 22. | noble elders | : Kovalan and Kannaki |
| Line 40. | this city | : Kaveri-p-poompattinam. |
| Line 53. | Sampati | : The eagle celebrated in the Ramayana. |

A son of Aruna, Sampati lost his wings when he flew close to the Sun and was immobilised thereafter through his long life.

Line 60. One Lord : Lord Buddha

Line 75. Mayan : the divine sculptor

Lines 76-80. "This divine seat was so made as to illustrate that those who do not put their heart and soul in any undertaking of theirs, will not derive any benefit thereof and those who do things with a purpose and resolution of mind would reap the fruit."

- N.Balusamy, Studies in Manimekalai, p.72.

Line 102. him : the Jina monk

Line 106. Madar blossoms are said to induce madness, if consumed.

Lines 124-125. According to the Hindu legends, Banasura imprisoned Krishna's grandson, Anirudda. Krishna's son Pradyumna dressed himself up as a eunuch and danced in the streets of Bana's capital to gain Anirudda's release.

Line 138. guardian string : A string with tiny replicas of Vishnu ■ conch, discus, mace, sword and bow to invoke the Lord's grace to guard the child.

Line 147. Virata city : The city in Mahabharata where the Pandavas took refuge, disguised as a royal companion (Yudhistira), a cook (Bhima), a eunuch (Arjuna), a stable-keeper (Nakula) and a keeper of the kine (Sahadeva).

4. Entry into the Marble Room

(*Sutamati* points out the various heart-warming sights of nature in the garden to *Manimekalai*. Due to the thick foliage of big trees, the place is dark. Birds and beasts sport themselves in gay abandon.

The royal elephant, *Kalavegan*, had been in rut and was now causing fear among *Kaveri-p-poompattinam*'s festival crowd. On hearing this, the brave Prince *Udayakumaran* rushed to the place and brought the elephant under control. Later he drove through the main streets. On his way he met his friend *Ettikumaran* who was twanging a lute and singing a sad ditty. Questioned, *Ettikumaran* said that he had seen *Manimekalai* walk towards the garden and had been reminded of *Kovalan*'s sad fate. *Udayakumaran* who was already in love with *Manimekalai* hastened to the garden to seize her.

Hearing the Prince's chariot-wheels, *Manimekalai* confides to *Sutamati* her fears of a possible kidnap. On the latter's advice she conceals herself in the marble room of the garden. The Prince questions *Sutamati* who replies with words of wisdom. As he listens, the Prince's eyes discover the form of *Manimekalai* inside the luminous room).

"This the grove that seems a retreat to night
Which is pursued by the troops of the Sun's rays;
Here the bees simulate the sounds of flute
While their fledgelings chime like the strings of
a lute;
No sun comes here, but the cuckoos do;
View the peacocks dance while the monkeys watch!
On the crystalline waters of the lake
With its spread of green leaves and many blooms,
Rises high a large sweet-scented lotus
Where a royal swan holds court observing

A peacock dancing on the banks to sounds
Of water-birds and music of cuckoos
On the tree-branches: look upon all this!
Like your face that has lost its brightness
Due to road dust whirled by moving wagons
These lotuses are dulled by the pollen
That has drifted from those fragrant screw-pines
Which bend as they grow on the banks of the lake!
Watch your rosy hand that stops these bees
Which mistake your face for a lotus!
Such the red fish approaching the lotuses
Efflorescent; at them with wings outspread
The kingfishers swoop in vain. See the sight."
Thus *Sutamati* showed the garden and
The lake to eager *Manimekalai*.

20

Like a ship whose captain is in deep-fright,
Its mast broken, the knots of sail loosened
And hang awry, its deck splintered all over,
The torn sail swishing, it tosses helpless
All over the sea with no sense of course
Caught as it is in a grim tornado,
The royal elephant *Kalavegan*
Was in rut, the attendants were helpless,
The mahout nowhere; it deterred the blood
That flowed from a facial wound, and traversed
Like a blue mountain walking on the earth,
The King's Way, the main road, the shopping street,
Spreading confusion in *Pukar* city
All over its twin divisions of land,
Not keeping to a course, nor taking rest,
As the keeper, the drummer, birds of prey
And helpless citizens set up a din;
Udayakumaran, son of the King
Whose white umbrella outstrips the sun's sheen,
Galloped hither speedily on his horse
And brought the pachyderm under control.
Accompanied by resplendent soldiers,
The Prince held on to the lovely chariot pole
And appeared to the citizens
Like *Muruga* with the *katampa* garland,

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Only, he had a string of *athi* blooms;
 In the street where stage actresses live
 On the first floor of a golden mansion
 At the window nearest to the road
 Was *Ettikumaran* in a statuesque pose
 Clutching the curved end of a fish-shaped lute
 Self-forgotten in the embrace of a maid
 With dark tresses, on a flower bedspread;
 To him the Prince queried : 'What's thy sorrow
 Even when clasped by such a lovely girl?'

60

Immediately *Ettikumaran*

Went with the maid to the Prince and bowed.
 To the King's son with honey-fresh garland
 He detailed the source of his recent grief.

"I saw *Madhavi's Manimekalai*

Lustreless as a flower kept within
 A pretty box, go towards the garden.

That reminded me of the terrible
 Fate which befell *Kovalan*; that sorrow

Led my heart out of tune and my finger
 Plucked the wrong string causing me deep distress."

70

The Prince with the garland was glad at heart.

"I shall place her in my fine chariot

And come hither;" saying so to his friend

He drove his chariot through the main road

Like the moon that cuts across speeding clouds,

And reached the entrance to the flower grove.

As she heard the sounds of the chariot

The maid spoke to her friend in sweet accents:

"I have heard *Vasanthamalai* speak

80

To *Madhavi* about the desire for me

That has waxed in *Udayakumaran*

With the aid of our *Chitrapati*.

Those sounds of chariot that I hear

Appear to be his: what shall I do?"

Sutamati like a frightened peacock

Asked the maid to enter the marble room,

Conceal herself and keep the bolts well-barred;

Not far away from the room, she stood guard.

The Prince stopped his accompanying friends

90

And chariot at the gate; like a Sun
 Penetrating the grove rich with flowers
 He entered and searched with his lotus eyes
 The trees around and artificial hills;
 Then accosted her: "Why are you here alone?
 I know you. Has not your youthful friend
 Observed the weight of her breasts on her waist?
 Has not her childish prattle given way
 To maturity, raising pearl-white teeth?
 Do not her long eyes approach her ears
 And transcribe the message of cupid's bow?
 Why has *Manimekalai* come here
 Alone, far away from the hermitage?
 Tell me!" The Prince urged the waiting lady.
Sutamati wearing flowers on her hair
 And distressed as in an airless dungeon, said:
 "What can bejewelled ladies like me tell
 Of wisdom, excellence and politics
 To the descendant of the King who hid his youth
 In garments of old age to pronounce judgement?
 Such is my position. Yet shall I speak.
 Listen. O Prince whose hand is born to rule!
 This body is caused by previous deeds.
 It is a field for further *karma*; and
 Sans decor, mere meat to be cast off.
 Subject to age; receptacle of ills;
 Cause of desire; container of misdeeds;
 A pit that hides the snake known as anger;
 Within it is the heart tossed by sorrow,
 Fear, helplessness and an endless pain;
 Knowing thus, look close at the inner truth."
 Ere her voice of wisdom couched in sweet words
 Reached his heart, from within the marble room
 Appeared to the prince's roving eyes
 The statuesque form of the youthful maid.

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Lines 22-23. According to P.V.Somasundaram; this scene where
 the kingfisher returns to the sky after vainly attempt-

ing to gather the red fish is symbolic of what is to come, i.e., Udayakumaran returning after unsuccessfully attempting to take away Manimekalai forcibly.

Line 39. twin divisions : the two parts of the city distinguished as 'Maruvurpakkam' and 'Pattinappakkam.'

Line 51. The garland made of athi flowers which is the floral insignia of the Chola dynasty.

Line 72. It is now easy to carry away Manimekalai who has come out of the protective walls of her Buddhist nunnery.

Line 79. Maid : Manimekalai
Friend : Sutamati

Lines 109-110. the King : King Karikala "An intricate case had come up to Karikal for decision. His aged ministers appeared anxious about the result. The youthful King understood the meaning of their looks. He retired at once into his private apartments, and there, tied false grey hair on his head, and appeared back in the Court, in the disguise of an old man. Resuming his seat on the throne he examined the parties skilfully that from their own answers he was able to pronounce a correct judgement, which elicited the applause of his grey-headed ministers." - V.Kanakasabhai, The Tamil Eighteen hundred years ago, p.66.

5. The Manifestation of Goddess Manimekala

(The Prince questions *Sutamati* about *Manimekalai* who stands still within the room and is told that the maid has performed penance and is powerful enough to curse him. Not wishing to rush *Manimekalai*, the Prince asks *Sutamati* about her circumstances. She tells him that as she found refuge in a Jain monastery, her father came in search of her. He too stayed in the city and lived through alms. One day the father was grievously gored by a cow. No one would come to their help, not even the Jain monks. Only a *Buddhist* monk *Sanga Dharma* took pity on them and saved them. From that time she had chosen to remain in the *Buddhist* nunnery. The Prince leaves vowing to find out other means of getting at *Manimekalai*.

Manimekalai comes out of the room and confesses that despite the Prince's referring to her as a courtesan, her heart had sought his company. She is disturbed by such a desire, and tries to banish it. Just then Goddess *Manimekala*, the family deity of *Kovalan* comes into the garden to worship *Buddha's Feet*).

The image of the maid that the Prince saw
 Was golden, as if an expert painter
 Had on a marble canvas sought to paint
 Goddess *Lakshmi* as the killer-beauty;
 He felt the aim was to tug at his heart
 Through Cupid who has five flower-arrows
 And a fish-flag; amazed at the likeness
 He soon saw that it was the living maid.
 Looking for an entrance he went around
 Searching with his hands the walls. Then he to
Sutamati: "Wonderful painting this!
 What sort of a person is your friend?"
 "Though you are like *Muruga* who destroyed
 The Mountain-ogre she will not see you;
 Deep is her penance gathered through deeds in
 Previous births: she has power to damn.

Not for her the lure of carnal desire."

Such was *Sutamati's* reply to him.

"Can any dam stop floods beyond control?

When desire overflows, where is restraint?

If she is virgin pure, may she be mine!"

Withdrawing with unslaked heart, he added:

"O rosy-hued! people of this city

Refer to you as a pretty girl left

In a Jain retreat by a demi-god;

Why have you forsaken that refuge and

Accompanied the maiden to this grove?"

"Prince with the victory-anklet! Prosper.

May your heart keep away from evil!

O you born to rule this land! Listen to

The cause which brought me here with the lass.

My father who lost his devoted wife

Was an old Brahmin, given to stern fasts,

And fire-rituals which bring us rain.

Pitying me who had transgressed honour

Because of fate, himself of high repute,

He mingled with pilgrims on holy tour

To Comorin and came searching for me.

Reaching the meeting-place of *Kaveri*

And the sea with some Brahmins, he saw me;

"How did you come here, my child?" he cried

Shedding tears over my head; and though

No more was I fit for a Brahmin's home,

Out of love he wished not to forsake me.

He took to begging, going from house to

House in this city -- one day he was gored

By a cow that had but recently calved:

Holding his blood-dripping entrails in hand

Like a garland of red oleanders,

And unable to bear the intense pain

He came in great distress to where I lived

Saying, "O Jains! Help!" But the anchorites

Albeit in saintly dress, denied him help

As a stranger; further, enraged with me

Gestured us to go away: eyes tear-filled,

We walked the streets of house-holders, wailing:

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"Are there men of *dharma*? We are helpless!"

Towards us came one used to wandering
Among the sky-rise homes with a begging bowl:
He wore an yellow robe dyed with golden
Maruta flowers: from his face poured grace
As a moon risen when the sun is hottest.

60

"What afflicts you?" he asked and saw our state.

With his kind words he filled our ears
And thus soothed our hearts. Giving to me
His vessel, he lifted up my father
On his shoulders kindly with both his hands
And led us to a monastery. He

Who saved my father was the holy saint
Sanga Dharma: he taught us the True Way.

Our Lord, Self-taught, the Essence of Faultless
things,

70

Incarnating in nature's several forms,
Always living for the good of others,
Never for himself: for the good of the world
His penance with the ideal of *Dharma*.
Hence his rolling the wheel of *Dharma* Rays.
He won victory over Desire: *Buddha's* Feet
Shall I praise, my tongue shall nought else do.

O Prince! May you prosper!" "Lovely lady
With beautiful speech: I have understood.

80

There are ways to win *Manimekalai*
With the help of *Chitrapati*!" He said

And tired in spirit, he left the grove.
Opening the marble room, her eyes still
On her cool moon face as if in a trance
Manimekalai with blooms on her hair
Came out and pronounced to *Sutamati*:

"In words censorious he spoke of me
As unchaste, with no penance, unguarded.
A woman for sale, and would possess me.
Yet, my mind followed the stranger's footsteps.
Mother! Is this the nature of desire?

90

If so, may it be destroyed for ever!"
Just then Goddess *Manimekala* who
Had wished to see the *Indra* festival

In the guise of a lovely *Pukar* maid
 Went round the lotus seat in the marble room:
 "O Seer! the Pure! the Holy! the Ancient!
 How shall I praise thee? As one risen high
 Even in this world? Burnt the three sins?
 Beyond anger? Foremost in knowledge?
 You have defeated desire; you are Joy!
 You have purged the enemy, bad conduct.
 Lacking a thousand tongues how shall I praise
 Thy feet adorned with the thousand-spoked
 wheel?"

100

Thus she like a glowing jewelled creeper
 Straying alone on earth, stood with her feet
 Away from the ground, and prayed in full conscious-
 ness:

Pukar damsel's fame is beyond our ken.
 The moat with pure water and blooms, her feet.
 The songs of birds, her anklet's sweet music.
 Her waist-band is the fort-well-bastioned.
 The entrance gates are her lofty shoulders.
 Twin temples of the Tree and Thunderbolt
 Face each other as healthy youthful breasts.
 Her auspicious face is *Chola's* palace
 Immensely proportioned to last aeons
 And well-known in fame all over the world.
 While the full moon in the east and
 The red sun that speeds to dip in the west
 As ear-drops made of silver and gold
 Gather brilliance to her faultless face,
 As the male swan tears open the lotus
 Whose petals have occluded shutting in
 His tired beloved, and with her freed
 Flies to rest on a coconut palmleaf,
 As the female curlew calls out to its mate
 To appraise the coming of evensong,
 As the large eyed cows that had grazed in fields
 On water-lilies among red-footed swans
 Now remember their calves and return home
 While the oozing milk from their udders settles
 the dust.

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As the Brahmins light vesper's holy fire,
And bejewelled ladies enkindle lamps,
While the strummers twang sweet *marutam*
And flautists choose the *mullai* melody,
Like a daughter who had lost her husband
In the battle returns to natal home,
Grieved by the demise of her Lord, the Sun,
The lady evening, pale all over,
Came to reside in great *Pukar* city.

140

Line 6. Five flower : the arrows of the Indian Cupid,
 arrows Kama are made of the flowers
 Asoka, the blue lily, lotus, mango
 blossoms and jasmine.

Lines 13-14. The reference is to Lord Muruga (Subramania) who
 rent in twain a demon in the form of a mountain
 named Krauncha.

Line 16. Manimekalai's askesis is so pure that she is already
 capable of cursing the evil-minded.

Line 35. The ravishment of Sutamati by Marutavega is narrated
 in the earlier canto, 'Entry into the Flower Garden',
 11. 28-41.

Line 38. Comorin : The Cape which is the southernmost
 tip of India where the three oceans
 meet. It is a holy place for pilgrim-
 mage.

Lines 71-78 Sutamati's prayer to Lord Buddha.

Line 77. He won victory over Desire:

When Buddha was performing penance under the
Mahabodhi tree, Mara, the incarnation of Desire,
tempted him in several ways; but the Lord overcame

all the temptations and thus Mara had to withdraw, defeated.

Line 91. stranger : Prince Udayakumaran

Lines 98-105. Goddess Manimekala's prayer to Buddha.

Line 100. Three sins : lust, anger and ignorance.

Line 105. The feet that had the sign of a thousand-spoked wheel, betokening spiritual royalty.

Lines 107-108. The feet of the immortals do not touch the earth.

Line 109. Pukar damsel : the city.

Line 110 ff. A magnificent epic simile comparing the city to a youthful maiden. Along with the evening scenes of Nature in its benevolent mood, the closing lines of this canto are among the most lyrical in the epic.

Line 114. Temple of the Kalpa-Taru (Wish-fulfilling Tree) and the Temple of Vajrayudha (Indra's Thunderbolt).

Lines 135-136. Marutam and Mullai are individual modes in the musicology prevalent in ancient Tamil Nadu.

6. The Temple of the Wheel

(After worshipping the Lord's Feet, Goddess *Manimekala* asks *Sutamati* why they are tarrying here. On being told about the Prince's designs, the Goddess suggests that they hide themselves in the Temple of the Wheel nearby and go home at dawn. *Sutamati* wants to know why the Temple is referred to as a cemetery by the common people. The Goddess recounts the story of *Gotamai* whose son had died of fright while walking across the burning-ghat. The mother had called upon Goddess *Sambapathi* to restore her son to life. *Sambapathi* had invoked all the Gods and godheads of the universe to this place to show one's helplessness against the finality of death. Subsequently, the divine architect *Maya* had built the scene of the converging of the gods in terms of a splendorous temple for posterity. *Sutamati* and *Manimekalai* fall asleep. The Goddess carries away *Manimekalai* to a distant island).

As the dark ended, the bright morn arose
 And shone effulgent spreading countless rays;
 Like the fault of one born in a noble
 Family seems extra-offensive,
 The moon's dark stain showed up in the clear sky;
 But the cool rays of the moon were faultless,
 Drizzling here and there in the garden
 Like milk flowing from a silver-white pot.
 Appearing in a form lightning-bright,
 All gorgeous sheen with rainbow colours,
 She bowed to the Holy Seat, the Feet of
 The First One, the Lord of the *Dharma*-Wheel.
 In the figure a *Pukar* damsel
 She drew near *Sutamati* and asked:
 "Why are you here? What perturbs you both?"
 When *Sutamati* spoke of the Prince's words
 The Goddess replied: "The King's son has still
 Designs on the maid: he went away in peace
 Only because this is a sacred grove.

But he will not allow her to escape him 20
 In the road outside. Shun the main pathway
 And go through the small gate on the Western
 Side of the wall enclosing this garden.
 If you reach the Annexe of the Wheel where
 Ascetics live in peace, you will be safe
 From harm even if it becomes nighttime."
 "Apart from the sinister demi-god
Marutavega and your good self,
 All the people of this immense city
 Call it only a crematorium. 30
 I do not know why you speak of it as
 The Annexe of the Wheel. Could you tell me
 The inner significance of the term?"
 "I will now explain the name's origin.
 Listen to me along with *Madhavi's*
 Daughter even if it gets dark," she said.
 "When famous *Pukar* was built, they structured
 A crematorium near this grove.
 A gate with representation of gods
 Moving around in self-propelled chariots; 40
 A gate with life-like paintings of paddy,
 Sugar-cane, lakes of water and gardens;
 A gate with spaces all white-washed with lime
 But left blank, with no drawings on the walls;
 A gate where stood a terrible figure
 Mud-baked, its red lips pursed, eyes ferocious,
 The hands holding a noose and a trident;
 These four gates of a lofty compound wall
 Guard the crematory where people go but rarely.
 With surrounding trees from where hang the heads 50
 Of dauntless ones who performed self-sacrifice
 And a large front with the sacrificial stone
 Stands the Temple of the Goddess *Kotravai*.
 Be they saints famed for penance, or great Kings,
 Or chaste wives who had committed suttee,
 Memorial images of burnt clay
 Made for them by dear ones according
 To the four castes, lay as hills big and small
 Forming an enormous cemetery;

Sacrificial pillars to potent gods; 60
 Memorial stones and hangman's junctions;
 Resting spaces of cremation-ground keepers
 Who guard with stick and cooking pot in hand;
 Smoke from burning corpses and livid flames;
 Sheds for pyres; such piles everywhere.
 Those who burn corpses or leave them unburnt,
 Bury them deep or not, or place them in pots;
 Day and night the shouts of people busy thus
 But none of them has desire to tarry for long.
 Funeral drums that sound deep the message 70
 Of mortality to the living ones;
 Noisy prayers to deceased ascetics;
 Wails from relatives of householders;
 The tormenting howls of long-faced jackals;
 The hoots of the owls calling out to the dying;
 Meat-satisfied voice of the Bird of night;
 The cock's screech as it scrapes the scattered brains;
 Such the constant noises of the annexe
 Rivalling the roar of immense oceans.
 The Hall of Sirissa trees flowering 80
 And many-branched, where hungry spirits live
 Among trees such as myrobolan, *oduvai*,
 Mimosa, *kanrai*, *surai* and the Deadwood.
 The Hall of Wood-apple trees where nestle
 Birds that have gorged on the flesh of corpses;
 The Hall of Vanni trees where exorcists
 Prepare their arts with unflinching will, cook;
 The Hall of Jujube trees where sit men
 Stringing immense garlands of human skulls;
 The Hall with no trees where people cook 90
 Human flesh in pots for their grisly feast;
 All over the place are found pots with fire,
 Vessels with *puzhal*, empty biers, knots
 Of coins, cast-off garlands, broken casks
 Paddy, fried rice, rice as small offering --
 This is the expansive cemetery.
 Death makes no distinction between god-men,
 The rich, post-natal young women, children;
 He spares neither the aged, nor the young;

The Terrible Reaper kills large numbers. 100
 Even after watching the fire-mouth
 Of the cremation-ground gobbling, people
 Drink and dance and live not the dharmic life.
 Are there greater fools than these same mortals?
 The boy *Samgala* walked here alone
 Taking this to be a fortress township.
 A corpse lay there asking men understand
 That the body is just bone, flesh and blood;
 A jackal howled in satiated joy
 Biting a lacquer-ornamented foot 110
 Of a corpse covered all over with worms;
 A vulture screamed in that space as it pecked
 The waist, now no more covered with jewels;
 The harsh joy of the dog's bark that had found
 A hand with bangles and broke them for bone;
 The noise of a kite that feasted rich
 On a breast once covered by sandalpaste;
 In that stage where bodies of various
 Characters burn to ashes, drums resound;
 Holding a head trailing dark tresses rose 120
 A devil-woman flashing macabre joy.
 No idea she had of cloud or hair,
 Fish or eye, flower or nose, lips or petals,
 Teeth or pearls; nor did she have compassion;
 She gouged out the eyes and ate them. Her forked feet
 Marking steps, she danced with devilish glee.
 The boy saw this and took great fright. Running
 In another direction he called out:
 "Mother ! Look ! I have given away my life
 To the ghost-crone in the cemetery." 130
 He fell down at his mother's feet and died.
 "Woman of ill-luck I am and live with
 My sightless husband. Was it sprite or ghost
 That devoured the life of my small boy
 Without a thought for my sad helpless state?
 O *Sambapathi*! Have you no mercy?
 Guardian of lakes, halls and ancient trees,
 Of households and temples! Come and save me!"
 So lamented *Gotamai* at the gate

140

Of the cremation-ground's fortress, holding
 To her breast the life-less form of her son.
 The Goddess with golden sheen appeared
 And said: "You have called for me at midnight
 Stung by deep sorrow in this ghostly place
 Which people do not frequent. What ails you?"
 "I am a helpless woman. My harmless
 Son who went near the cremation-ground
 Was deprived of life by a spook or a ghost.
 Look at him lying thus as if in sleep!"
 "The spook and the ghost never feast on the living.
 Clinging to the Brahmin boy's ignorance
 Came his past deeds and dealt a fatal blow.
 Hence give up your terrible sorrow."
 "If you could take my life and spare my boy
 He would protect my visionless husband.
 Give back his life and gather mine instead!"
 The ancient goddess, compassionate,
 Said: "Where is the doubt that when life departs
 It is born again according to its *karma*?
 It is impossible for me to bring
 That new life to relieve you. Do not grieve.
 There are evil ones who call murder
Dharma: theirs is foolish talk, O woman!
 Are there no people to give in exchange
 Their lives for the lives of kings? A thousand
 Royal head-stones dot this burial ground!
 Give up speaking such lacerating words!"
 "The four holy scriptures of Brahmins aver
 As one that gods give boons unfailingly.
 O greatest of gods! If you are not kind
 I shall die right here!" said *Gotamai*.
 "Without *Brahma* creating living breath
 If any other god in this Annexe
 Of Wheel gives back a life, I too could do.
 Watch the extent of my abilities."
Sambapathi then invoked the four-fold
 Formless *Brahmas*, sixteen Creative Lords,
 The Sun and the Moon, the shining hosts in
 The Six-fold Worlds of the gods, many demons,

150

160

170

The hapless sufferers in infernos 180
 Eight, the countless stars spread over the sky,
 Twenty-seven asterisms, planets,
 She called these boon-giving denizens of
 The Wheel Annexe in front of *Gotamai*:
 "Such is her sorrow. Please give her relief,"
 She said. Hearing the assembled gods
 Express the same view as *Sambapathi*
Gotamai was set free from her distress
 And she flung herself upon her son's burning pier.
 In that ground where all the godheads had met 190
 By the conurement of *Sambapathi*
 Within the Mount Wheel surrounded by sea
 Is the central high-rising Meru hill;
 Closeby stand the seven temple hillocks;
 The four islands vast in their area;
 Scattered around are two thousand islets;
 These and other things were properly fashioned
 In the light of tradition to educate men
 By capable *Maya* who made mud shapes
 Later kilned to real-life likenesses 200
 Of living things and their dwelling places.
 This is known as the Temple of the Wheel.
 Because of its nearness to the wall
 Of the crematory, people refer to it as
 The burning-ghat, this is its history."
 As the Goddess spoke with a humble heart
 All compassionate, of mortality,
 Midnight darkness converged into the grove.
 Leaving behind sleeping *Sutamati*
 The Goddess *Manimekala* carried 210
 The drowsy maid thirty *yojanas* through the sky
 And descended on a southern island,
Manipallavam, begirt by ocean.
 Leaving the girl alone, she departed.

The Temple of the Wheel described in Manimekalai's Renunci-
 ation is Sathanar's representation of Buddhist cosmology as detailed

by Vasubandhu in Abhidharmakosa and Asanga in Yogacharyabhumi Sastra. At the exact centre of the Chakravala (Wheel) or Cosmo is the mountain Mahameru. Around this mountain are seven circles, i.e., Yugandhara, Isadhara, Khadiraka, Sudarsana, Asvakarna, Vinataka and Mimindhara. Between each circle is an ocean. Located in the outermost ocean and outside the seventh circle are the four great continents, one on each side of the world. The whole of the known world is but a part of Jambudvipa which is the great Southern continent. This is known so because this island has plenty of Jambu trees. On each side of these four continents are several small islands.

The Chakravala contains thirty-one worlds which are classified as the region of Desire, the region of Form and the region of Formlessness. In the region of Desire we have eleven worlds (which have their own sub-divisions): of Hell, of Spirits, of Animals, of Mankind, of Asuras, of Heaven of the four great kings, of the Heaven of thirty-three gods, of the Heaven of Yama, of the Heaven of Tusita, of the Heaven of Nirmanarati and the Heaven of Paranirmitavasavarti. In the region of Form we have sixteen worlds containing inhabitants free of desire. These worlds or Heavens are of Brahma's retainers, Brahma's Ministers, Brahma himself, of Lesser Light, of Infinite Light, of Universal Light, Of Lesser Purity, of Infinite Purity, of Universal Purity, of Great Results, of Fortunate Birth, of Passionlessness, of Non-affliction, of Perfect Form, of Perfect Vision and the Heaven Highest. In the region of Formlessness we have four worlds whose inhabitants have neither form nor desire: the Heavens of Boundless Space, of infinite Consciousness, of Absolute Non-existence and the Heaven of Neither Consciousness nor Unconsciousness.

(For further details see Dr.S.N.Kandaswamy, Buddhism as Expounded in Manimekalai, pp. 204-216).

Lines 3-4. Cf. *corruptio optimi pessima*, the worst of all is the corruption of the best.

Line 24. The place adjoining the sanctum.

Lines 27-33. This is spoken by Sutamati.

Line 53. Kotravai : the Mother Goddess of ancient

Tamil religious lore.

- Line 58. The four castes of priests, warriors, merchants and labourers.
- Line 67. These burial pots were known as 'Mudumakkal Tazhi.'
- Line 76. The kottan, a species of owl.
- Line 93. Puzhal is a kind of sweet.
- Line 105 ff. The Goddess gives an account of Sarngala to teach Sutamati and Manimekalai the evil that comes out of ignorance and the inevitability of death.
- Line 120 ff. The dance of the spirits feasting over dead bodies is often the subject of extended description in ancient Tamil classics like Kalingathu-p-parani and Thakka-Yaga-p-parani.
- Lines 121-124. A dig at the conventional romantic descriptions which find similarity between the fish and the eye, the kumizh flower and the nose, the lips and petals of flowers, and liken teeth to pearls.
- Line 142. Goddess with golden sheen : Sambapathi.
- Lines 164-166. Even though plenty of people would come forward to sacrifice themselves to bring back to life their King, the feat is impossible. The thousand head-stones in memory of dead Kings are witness to this truth.
- Line 176 ff. Four-fold formless Brahmas
 the Arupa Brahmas who inhabit the four worlds, highest in Buddhist cosmology: akasanantyayatana, vijñānantyayatana, ākīmcanīyātana and naivasam-jānsamjñayatana.
 The sixteen Creative Lords;

the Rupa- Brahmas who have form and inhabit the Brahmayika, loka with sixteen heavens: Brahmaparisajjas, Brahma purohitas, Mahabrahmes, Parittabhas, Appamanabhas, Abhassaras, Perittasubhas, Appamanasubhas, Subhakinnas, Vehapphalas, Asannasattas, Abhihas, Atappas, Sudessas, Sudessins and Akanitthas.

Six-fold worlds of gods:

the gods who inhabit Mahayika loka, made of six heavens: Caturmaharajika, Trayastrimsa, Yama, Tushita, Nirmanarati and Paranirmitavasavarti.

Lines 180-181. Infernos eight : Samjiva, Kalasutra, Samghata, Raurava, Mahaurava, Tapana, Pratapana and Avici.

7. Waking

(After depositing *Manimekalai* in *Manipallavam* isle, the Goddess *Manimekala* returns to *Pukar*. She first appears before Prince *Udayakumaran* and advises him not to molest *Manimekalai* who has decided to renounce the world. Proceeding to the Temple of the Wheel, the Goddess wakes up *Sutamati*, asks her not to worry about *Manimekalai* and also comfort *Madhavi*. *Sutamati* is frightened at the turn of events. She is comforted by the Pillar-statue who assures her that she was a sister of *Manimekalai* in the past birth, and will soon be reunited with her. *Sutamati* goes to *Madhavi* and appraises her of what has taken place).

Ever since seeing *Manimekalai*
 In the garden, *Udayakumaran*
 Was stung by desire and tossed on bed
 Waiting for night's end to seize her for himself;
 The Goddess *Manimekala*, after
 Leaving the maid in *Manipallavam*
 Appeared before him and said: "O Prince!
 Should royal sceptres bend, planets go awry;
 When planets move not proper, no rains fall;
 No life can exist when drought stalks the land;
 The King loses his potency to guard
 The lives of his people as his own self.
 Give up this baneful desire for the girl
 Consecrated to a life of penance."
 The goddess proceeded to the garden
 And woke up slumbering *Sutamati*;
 "I came to see the festive *Pukar* town.
 Do not fear. I am *Manimekala*.
 The time has come for the lovely young girl
 To tread *Buddha's* dharmic path. Hence did I
 Transport the maid by enchantment
 To the inviolable *Manipallavam*.
 Having learnt well of her previous births
 The good virgin would reappear in
 This city, in another seven days;

10

20

Though she would come in disguise to this rich town
She would certainly reveal herself to you.

From the day she reenters this city,
Many fate-propelled events will occur;

Speak to *Madhavi* about my coming

30

And of the flawless path chosen by her
Daughter; she will understand my doings.

On the day *Kovalan* named his daughter

After me, speaking about 'the goddess
Who lives in mid-sea,' at midnight I came

To her in a vision and said: 'You have
Given birth to a great saint who will soon

Make Cupid jobless, and destroy sorrows."

Tell her this!" Having spoken, the sublime

Goddess rose in the sky, and went away.

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Sutamati rose with a grieving heart.

In the large dancing floors, girls who had danced

With their teachers detailing the poses

For the people's delight, now lay asleep.

With them rested the musical instruments.

The sweet strings of the lute which had joined

Feminine voices expert in music

Now lost their tunes lacking warmth, as girls

Plucked sleepily, their fingers now grown slack.

Piqued by their husbands seeking courtesans,

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Red-eyed wives refused to relent even

When they were asked forgiveness, and now slept
apart.

Once asleep, they drew close and hugged their men!

Little children with guardian-necklace

Having prattled and spent the day restless

Dragging toy carts, slept in bed tired out.

Their foster-mothers arranged spicy smoke

To keep out the evil eye, and themselves

Settled down in their sleeping mattresses.

Domesticated pigeons, water birds

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And fowls in groves drew in their tongues and slept.

Hushed were festival sounds. Drums rested.

Thus the ancient town slept at night.

However, time-keepers in the palace

Watching the water-machine shout the hour;
 Pachyderms that refuse food and grow thin
 Uncontrollably trumpet in their stables.
 Watchmen bang their drums to sound their presence
 In main thoroughfares and narrow by-lanes.
 Expert builders who build ships in harbours
 Wave-battered, grow boozy tippling rice-wine
 And croak old-time songs with gay abandon.
 Young mothers accompanied by women
 Who carry smoking pots of bitter neem
 And mustard to keep away evil sprites
 Chatter as they go for bathing in ponds.
 Though there are no battle-mongering foes,
 The King's soldiers heroic like tigers
 Offer self-sacrifice, thundering thus:
 "May our King be ever-victorious!"
 Exorcists shout with voices deep as they
 Invite the ghosts of the Hall to partake
 Their offerings as to bring relief for
 Wives lately brought to bed, little children,
 Pregnant women, and men with grievous wounds.
 As these and other sounds produced a roar
Sutamati was afraid: through the dark
 She of pearly teeth walked and left the garden.
 Passing through the gate on the Western wall
 She reached the famous Temple of the Wheel
 So wondrously described by the goddess.
 She went through a commodious portal
 And sat in a corner of the Town Hall.
 Here on a pillar was a statue
 Placed to forecast the future of mortals.
 As *Sutamati* drew back dezed by fright
 It spoke in a super-human accent.
 "O dear daughter of *Ravivarma*!
 Wife of *Duhsaya* famed for cavalry!
 You died at the feet of an elephant
 When you heard of sister *Tarai's* demise.
Kowsika's daughter hailing from *Samba*!
Sutamati who came to this city
 With *Marutavega*! You were *Veeral*

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Who has once again found *Tarai*. Listen.
 On the seventh day from now, at midnight
 Your younger sister *Lakshmi* will come
 Here with knowledge of your past births.
 Do not fear!" Hearing the statue
 The good woman's heart beat violently. 110
 The eyes of the night watchmen closed in sleep.
 Those who had been slumbering now awoke.
 Auspicious right-curling conches sounded loud.
 The voices of wise men recited hymns.
 Elephants with dotted faces trumpeted.
 Cocks with dappled hair crowed aloud.
 Horses standing in lines began to neigh.
 Birds on tree-branches set up a twitter.
 The bees in groves began a cadenced hum.
 Bangles in the hands of women tinkled. 120
 Flowers were offered at divine seats for worship.
 The shopping-centre was festooned with blooms.
 Shops selling musical tools rang with sounds.
 Eating places displayed various snacks.
 To wake up the city the sun arose
 From the sea, ripping the curtain night.
 As a peacock stricken by an arrow,
Sutamati walked with paining feet to the city.
 As she told *Madhavi* of all that happened
 In the night before, the mother was flung 130
 Into great sorrow for the daughter's absence,
 As a cobra that had lost its jewel.
 As for *Sutamati* who had witnessed
 All, she was like a body sans life.

Line 8.

Should royal sceptres bend

the sceptre is a symbol of royal power, raja-dharma. The phrase indicates that should there be any wrong committed by the King, disaster would follow.

Lines 33-34. Kovalan had named his daughter in gratitude to the goddess of the sea who had once saved an ancestor of his from the ocean's wrath.

Line 36. her : Madhavi

Line 65. 'See 'Entry into the Flower Garden', line 138.

water-machine which marks time.

Lines 73-76. Refers to the ancient habit of women bathing at night, ten days after delivering the child.

Line 98 ff. The statue recounts to Sutamati her past birth as Veetai when she was born to King Ravivarma of Yasodhara country. Duhsaya was the King of Anga.

Line 101. Tarei : Madhavi's name in her previous birth.

Line 107. Lakshmi : Manimekalai's name in the previous birth.

Line 111. This indicates the end of the night and the coming of the day.

8. Sorrowing at Manipallavam

(When she wakes up at *Manipallovam*, *Manimekalai* is shocked that she is all alone in an island. Getting no response to her shouts, she is filled with pity for herself and sorrows as memories of *Kovalan* dying in an alien city come crowding upon her. At this moment her eyes fall upon the Seat of *Buddha*).

Sutamati suffered thus in *Pukar*.

At *Manipallavam* circled by waves

The beach has pans ploughed by conch-varieties

Where grow crops of pearls, garnets lie scattered

Amid sandal trunks thrown inland by the waves.

In low-lying tarns shadowed by tall trees

Various water-lilies interwine,

While bee-sucking blossoms cover the lakes.

The crooked-trunked mastwood and blooming pine

Join together to keep out sunlight.

On the lined moon-white sand's flower-strewn bed

Rose *Manimekalai* from her deep sleep.

Like a life that leaves loving relations

At death, and is born elsewhere, she could see

None of her people, nor her native town.

Strange sights never before seen startled her.

As she gazed at the vast blue from which

Shone the morning sun spreading many rays

She cried: "Is this a corner of the grove?"

Sutamati! Where are you? I'm afraid.

Am I awake or asleep? I know not.

My heart is agitated. Please reply.

The night is gone. *Madhavi* will worry.

Come, my friend with bright bangles. Have you left me?

Is this the sorcery of the strange girl

Who appeared from nowhere? I don't know.

I'm afraid of being alone. Come!"

On the beach where swimming fowls, flying birds

Swooping beetles and cranes with folded feathers

Are gathered with the swan holding court mid

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The multi-coloured birds as courtiers,
 On the harbour-banks where the waves beat on
 Like enemy forces mid army camps,
 On the sand-dunes surrounding the harbour, --
 She wandered all over but saw no friend.
 Her tresses awry as the flowers fell
 She lamented and wailed mournfully.
 In that moment of reaching sorrow's depths
 She remembered her father and cried out:
 "Leaving me to fate which tortures me hither
 You went abroad with bejewelled mother
 Where your emblazoned breast was pierced
 Fatally, O father mine!" The maid wept.
 Here was a brilliant shining Seat
 Rising from the ground by four feet and half,
 Spreading thirteen feet and half on its sides,
 Properly sculpted in marble in circle shape
 With a lotus square placed on its summit.
 Trees would shower nought else but scented
 blooms on it

40

For it was the Seat of the Righteous One.
 Birds did not fly with outspread wings near.
 This was the jewelled Seat placed by *Indra*,
Buddha's chair that illumines our past births.
 From the East came here two *Naga* kings
 At the same time and wished to possess it.
 Despite their efforts, they could not move it.
 And yet they would not give up their claim.
 With reddened eyes and hearts aflame with hate
 They were locked in war and their army too.
 "Give up your enmity. This is mine."
 So saying *Buddha* sat on it and spoke
 Of *dharma* to the two kings. This great Seat
 Hailed by wise men was now perceived by her.

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Line 11. lined : marking successive waves according
to the tide.

Line 25. strange
girl : Goddess Manimekala

Line 39. father : Kovalan

Line 41. bejewelled
mother : Kannaki

Line 50. The reference is to the Seat of Buddha. In ancient
days these Seats with the impression of Buddha's
feet were worshipped by Buddhists. It is also referred
to as Dharma Peetikai, Buddha Peetikai and Mamani
Peetikai.

9. Recognising the Past

(As soon as *Manimekalai* sees the Seat of *Buddha*, memories of her life past come crowding upon her. She remembers her teacher in that life. He was *Brahmadharma*, the brother-in-law of the *Gandhara* King *Athipathi*. He foretold the destruction of *Athipathi's* land by the ocean's fury. As soon as the populace shifted, the prediction came true. *Manimekalai* then was *Lakshmi*, daughter of *Ravivarma*, the *Yasodhara* King. *Lakshmi* had married *Athipathi's* son *Rahula*. *Brahmadharma* had predicted *Rahula's* death by snake-bite, and this prophecy also came true. *Lakshmi* had then ascended the funeral pyre of *Rahula*).

When she saw the Seat, the maid forgot herself.

Her rosy hands came together in reverence.

With hands clasped in worship above her head

And pearl-like tears falling upon her breasts

She circumambulated thrice right-wards.

As if lightning with clouds had come on earth,

She bent down on the earth straining her waist

And got up, having recognised her birth past.

"Worshipful Holiness! Knower of Truth!

I have now remembered what you told me

At *Kayankarai* as factual truth.

In *Poorvadesa* of *Gandhara* land

Was the ruler *Athipathi* who reigned

In a righteous way: you, *Brahmadharma*,

Were his brother-in-law; to him you went,

Spoke of the *dharmic* path and gave warning.

'This island that is famous for the trees

Bearing sweet jamoon, will, in seven days

Be struck by a quake shaking everyone

O King! Then the four hundred *yojanas*

Of *Naga* land will sink into the deep

And will be destroyed completely. Give up

This place and go elsewhere!" The great King

Made it known to the city residents.

'Remove yourselves with cows and cattle!'

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Along with his very large army he
 Left the old capital of *Idavayam*
 And journeyed to *Avanti* in the North.
 On the banks of *Kayankarai* river
 In the grove of chey trees he halted. 30
Idavayam was totally destroyed
 Just as you had predicted earlier.
 Holy one of faultless wisdom! The King
 And his people drew close to your feet,
 Bowed and repeatedly praised you.
 Taking the *dharmic* vow for the world's good
 You spoke then of the unparalleled joy.
Ravivarma, King of *Yasodhara*,
 A populated country, had as queen
Amudapathi with red-lacquered feet. 40
 To her was I born and named *Lakshmi*.
 The consort of royal *Athipathi*
 Was the daughter of *Sridhara*, King of
Siddhipuram, known as *Neelapathi*.
 To her was born as a rising sun *Rahula*
 Whom I wed. Along with him I came
 And bowed at your worshipful feet.
 'In another eight days *Rahula* will be bit
 By the basilisk: with his dead corpse 50
 You will enter the flames, O lovely girl!
 There is nothing more to do for you here.
 You will be reborn in gladsome *Pukar*
 Named after the daughter of *Kavera*.
 When you find yourself in trouble there
 Goddess *Manimekala* will appear,
 Carry you away from *Pukar* at night
 And place you in an island in the South.
 See there the Seat on which the Physician
 For the disease of birth sat and advised
 The *Naga* kings to give up their anger, 60
 Cleansed them of mental ills, closed immoral ears,
 And opened them to the soulful listening of *dharma*.
 When you bow to it you will recognise
 Your past and see the truth of my words'.
 Heart saddened by hearing this message

I asked: "Won't you tell me of my lord's birth?"
 'That incandescent Goddess who brings you
 Will also tell you of your husband's
 New form': such was your message to me.
 When will that goddess come to me here?"
 Thus the young girl afflicted with grief, wept.

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- Line 1. Seat : The Seat of Buddha.
- Line 9 ff. Addressed to Brahma dharma who had taught Manimekalai the True Way in her last birth. The power of the Seat enables her to watch her past as happening before her once again.
- Line 11. Kayankarai : a river.
- Line 12. Poorvadesa : a country in the East.
- Line 49. basilisk : a legendary snake whose mere glance is said to be fatal.
- Line 53. daughter of
 Kavera : the river Kaveri.
- Lines 60-61. See 'Sorrowing at Manipallavam,' 11. 54-62.
- Line 66. My lord : Rahula, Manimekalai's husband in the previous birth.
- Line 67. incandescent
 goddess : Goddess Manimekala

10. Incantations Bestowed

(The Goddess *Manimekala* returns to *Manipallavam* and offers worship at the Seat of the *Buddha*. *Manimekalai* asks the goddess to tell her more about *Rahula*. The Goddess obliges. Once *Rahula* was sporting with *Lakshmi* when a *Buddhist* sage happened to come there. *Rahula* was impatient with the disturbance but *Lakshmi* told him not to be rude to elders. She brought cool water and food for the sage. Because of this good act *Manimekalai* will attain Release at the proper time. *Rahula* is now born as *Udayakumaran*. But *Manimekalai* is a precious seed and should not be wasted in the desert of carnal desire. That is why the Goddess had brought her away. *Madhavi* and *Sutamati* were *Lakshmi's* elder sisters in the earlier birth. They had married *Duhsaya* and had been taught the True Way by the saint *Aravana*. Since knowledge is important to gain true wisdom, the Goddess directs the maid to learn more about other philosophies. To enable her to do so, the Goddess teaches her three incantations. They would enable her to travel by air, change her form and go without food).

"The virgin has recognised her past births
And is blessed," thought *Manimekala*.
Holding scented flowers she descended
On the earth as a creeper in full bloom
And began praying to the Holy Seat
In words heard by her who had learnt her past.
"Humanity had lost its *dharmic* sense,
Its ears denying righteous advice.
To inject good mid moral poverty
Where no lamp shone to show the *dharmic* way
You were born as the lovely morning sun.
I bow at your feet. I bless this Seat
Meant for you as your own gracious form.
I hold your holy feet on my head.
I place flowers in worship. Guard me from
Sorrows;" thus the Goddess worshipped the Seat.

To her bowed the maid creeper-like on earth.
 "By your grace I know of my past birth.
 Where is my noble husband?" she inquired.
 "Listen, *Lakshmi*. Once you were upset with 20
Rahula in the garden. With desire
 Overwhelming, he sought to quieten you
 By worshipping your flower-soft feet.
 The pure *Sadhuchakra* was then moving
 In the sky on his way back from the isle
 Of Gem whither he had turned the *Dharma* Wheel.
 At mid-day he descended into the
 Garden. Seeing him you were quite abashed.
 O gentle girl, your body shuddered.
 Your waist drooping, you bowed before him. 30
Rahula snapped in anger: 'Who's that?'
 You hastily covered his lips saying:
 'Instead of paying respect to this saint
 Why will you shout?' And along with the prince
 You bowed to him who belonged to *Buddha*.
 'Immortal being! We mayn't belong to you.
 Yet we shall bring sweet water and good food.
 Kindly accept. We shall do as you wish.'
 'Mother, I shall eat. Bring here,' he said.
 The good that happened on the day he ate 40
 Has followed you and will give you release.
Udayakumaran who approached you
 In the garden was once Prince *Rahula*.
 He had loved you deeply and you too had
 A strongly winding affection for him.
 I thought a seed of *dharma* like you
 Could be wasted in desire like the seed
 Of *kandasali* in salty soil.
 To make your life purposeful have I acted.
 O *Lakshmi*! Hear. *Tarai* and *Veeral* 50
 Were your elder sisters in the past birth.
Duhsaya, with victory anklets,
 Who ruled the *Kachcha* principality
 In *Anga* land, married the two sisters.
 Once he had gone with them to sport among
 Hills, and reached the banks of flowing *Ganges*.

The wise and sinless saint *Aravana*
 Went to the same place. *Duhsaya* got up:
 'Who may you be?' he enquired and at once.
 Bowed at the feet of the austere one. 60
 'The Primal One, Ruler of the *Dharma*-Wheel
 Sought to release people from their sorrows
 And chase away the spectre of hatred
 For uniting human beings in love
 By speaking from this place in days of yore.
 On this hill lie the impression of his
 Lotus feet. For this reason people named
 It the divine hill of the lotus feet.
 I came to worship and go round the Seat.
 You good people! Join me in worship.' 70
 Assenting to his welcome words, they went
 And saluted with hands the divine Seat.
 Hence as *Madhavi* and *Sutamati*
 Were they born and rejoined you, O maid!
 You have learnt of your past and the Way.
 You must listen to the teachings of others now.
 O sweet girl! On the day when you seek out
 The religious knowledge of other sects
 The preceptors may not give you guidance
 As you are young and bejewelled. Take this 80
 Incantation to change form, and move in
 The skies." And the goddess taught her the chants.
 "Know that I wish you to follow the Way
 Of the *Buddha* who rejected worldly joy
 And attained knowledge on the Full Moon night.
 Worship this Seat which is beyond compare
 And return to your city." Rising
 She came down again to say: "I forgot.
 O maid following a great ideal!
 The human body is a mass of food. 90
 This great chant will release you from hunger."
 Teaching her the third incantation also
 The magnanimous goddess then left the place.

- Line 6. her : Manimekalai
- Line 11. you : Lord Buddha
- Line 20. Lakshmi : Manimekalai's name in the previous birth.
- Line 24. Sadhu-
 chakra : one who belongs to the circle of saints.

Lines 24-26. It is said that Buddhist saints who have attained siddhi, have the ability to fly in the air to enable them to visit holy places dedicated to Buddha.

- Line 26. Dharma-
 Wheel : Refers to the habit of Buddhist monks holding in their right hand a wheel on which is imprinted the incantation, 'Om Mane Padme Hum.' They keep whirling it either repeating the incantation or in silence.

- Line 36. we : Lakshmi and Rahula

- Line 48. Kandasali, a variety of paddy that has sweet scent and is of a superior variety.

11. Receiving the Vessel

(*Dipatilakai*, the goddess guarding *Manipallavam* appears before *Manimekalai* and learns about her. She herself has come recently from *Ratnadvipa* after worshipping the Feet of *Buddha* impressed upon the *Samanoli* Mountain. She tells *Manimekalai* that after *Aaputhran* placed the *Amuda Surabhi* in the *Gomukhi* lake, the vessel has been surfacing on the birth anniversary of the *Buddha*. Once again the time has come. *Manimekalai* is the right person to take charge of it. The maid receives the vessel and praises the Lord *Buddha*. *Dipatilakai* speaks of the evils of hunger and asks the maid to relieve hungry people of this dire distress. *Manimekalai* returns to *Pukar* by air and salutes *Madhavi* and *Sutamati*. The three women prepare to go and meet the Saint *Aravana*).

When goddess *Manimekala* withdrew
Manimekalai went around watching
 The white sand-dunes and flowering gardens,
 And water lakes in *Manipallavam*
 For a league: there appeared in holy
 Vestments the goddess *Dipatilakai*.
 She asked: "Bejewelled lady! Who are you
 Who have come here as from a sunken ship?"
 "You ask me 'who are you' But in which birth,
 Golden lady? Listen to me with care.
 In my past birth I was *Rahula's* wife
Lakshmi: at present *Manimekalai*,
 The daughter of the danseuse, *Madhavi*.
 The good goddess whose name I bear brought me
 To this island where on beholding
 The seat I recognised my births in the past.
 Such my coming hither and my knowledge.
 Lovely creeper-like lady! Who are you?"
 Coming to know of the maid's full knowledge
Dipatilakai spoke purposeful words.
 "Nearby is the Isle of Gem in which
 Rises high the Hill of *Samantaka*.

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The feet of the Lord who stood by *dharma*
 Are impressed on its top and appear
 As a boat to help us cross the sea of birth.
 I have just come after worshipping there.
 By the orders of *Indra*, the lord of gods,
 I guard this blameless and auspicious Seat.
 My name is *Dipatilakai*. Listen.

Only those who follow the *dharmic* way
 Peerless, as taught by the great *Buddha*
 Are worthy of bowing to this Seat.
 Presently they learn about their past births.
 Such beings are rare; to them is vouchsafed
 The teaching of *dharma*. Listen, O maid
 Who are such a one in this world!

30

The water-filled lake that fronts the great Seat
 Is *Gomukhi* always carpeted with
 Large lilies, dark-blue and pearl-white.

In summer-time during *Vaikasi* month,
 Right on the star that is counted fourteenth,
 Which is the centre of stars twenty-seven
 And is the birth star of my Lord *Buddha*,
Amuda Surabhi of *Aaputhran*,

40

The peerless vessel, becomes visible.
 Today is that star. The time is near.
 O maid! The vessel is coming to you.
 Life-giving food placed in it will increase
 And never cease, though the hands that receive
 May grow tired. Such is its uniqueness.

50

Learn from *Aravana* of your city
 The history of the vessel, O maid!"
 Hearing her, the young girl assented.
 After worshipping the glorious Seat
 She walked with goddess *Dipatilakai*,
 Went round the *Gomukhi* lake and waited.
 The vessel worthy of worship then rose
 And reached the hands of the girl standing there.
 The bejewelled maid was overjoyed
 By the gift of the vessel and exclaimed:
 "O Hero who has defeated Cupid!
 One who chased away the enemies of life!

60

Striving ever for, the good of others,
 You have denied for yourself the heavens.
 The state far beyond the reach of man's mind
 Is yours: you give us the wisdom-sight.
 Your ears are deaf to evil speech.
 Your tongue is blessed with uttering truth.
 You walk among the sinful to save them.
 By you the snakedom was freed from fear.
 I can but bow to thy blessed feet twain
 But have no ability to praise you!"

70

Dipatilakai also joined her
 And praised the Feet of the Lord seen under
 The *Bodhi* Tree for the good of the world, and said:
 "The evil that hunger is, destroys noble birth.
 It kills the good nature of those high-born;
 Divorces them from the staff of knowledge.
 Makes them shameless and strangers to beauty.
 Drags them to the streets along with their wives;
 I have no words to praise the fame of those
 Good people who cause its destruction.
 A time was when grass and tree charred smoking,
 Rains failed, and people died everywhere.
 Giving up his kingdom, the holy Brahmin
 Wandered all over the world helplessly
 Finding no way to appease his hunger.
 Ere he stooped to consume dog's meat
 He offered thanks giving to God *Indra*:
 That Lord of Immortals appeared,
 Brought rains, foodgrains plenty and thus saved
 lives.

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Charity to people who can pay back
 Is mere trade: the lives of only those
 Who save the helpless from hunger, are blessed.
 They who give nourishment to living beings
 In this world, give precious life itself.
 You have taken the vow of saving lives.
 Surely a peerless *dharmic* path!"
 "In my past birth my beloved husband
 Was fatally bit by a snake. As I
 Entered the fire and my senses were clouding

100

I had a vision of *Sadhuchakra*

Who had once appeared to me at noon

And I had had the fortune of feeding him.

Perhaps as a result, this good vessel

Like life-giving medicine has reached me.

In this enormous island of *Jambu*

There are homes prosperous due to good deeds

In the past: at their entrance stand many

Wearing rags, suffering pangs of hunger,

Unmindful of heat, daring heavy rains,

Loaded with sorrows innumerable

Due to their ways of evil in the past:

This magic vessel acts through the heart

As the breast of a mother when she yields

Sweet milk out of love for her new-born babe.

I wish to see this vessel gush forth food

For those poor people in like manner."

The goddess said: "I forgot one point.

Your words remind me. It will give food

Only for those who unselfishly serve

Others: *Dharma* is its witness. You know

All about it. Return now to your city."

Bowing to *Dipatilakai*, holding

The precious utensil in her hands,

And after worshipping the great Lord's Seat,

Manimekalai soared towards the sky.

"The seventh day foretold by the goddess

Has come. But not my daughter. Can the words

Of the divine be wrong?" So *Madhavi* pined.

Removing her worry, the maid appeared

And spoke to them wonderful tidings.

"O superb daughter of *Ravivarma*!

Wife of *Duhsaya* famed for his cavalry!

You were born as *Tarai* and *Vearai* to

Amutapathi, and were my elders.

Now my mothers! I bow at your feet.

To be freed from the sins of mortal birth

And escape the stranglehold of *karma*

Seek the sage *Aravana* to grant you

Illumination. He will tell you all.

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This is holy *Amuda Surabhi*
 Once the vessel of *Aaputhran*: worship it."
 They bowed and praised the holy vessel.
 "Come, let's to the blameless austere saint,"
 The maid said, and together they all went.

- Line 6. Dipe-tilakai : Guardian Goddess in charge of the Lotus Seat of Buddha.
- Line 14. good goddess : Goddess Manimekala.
- Line 19. full knowledge : Knowledge of past births.
- Line 21. Isle of Gem : Ratnadvipa or Ceylon.
- Line 22. Hill of Samantaka : Also known as Samanoli, the highest mountain in Ceylon, now called 'Adam's Peak.'
- Lines 41-42. Refers to the 14th lunar asterism.
- Line 51. Aravana : Madhavi's preceptor.
- Line 61 ff. Addressed to Buddha
- Line 64. Buddha's ideal was Nirvana and hence he rejected life in heaven that is impermanent, as one can stay in heaven only as long as one's good deeds give the privilege.
- Line 70. Refers to the Jataka tale which speaks of Buddha's teaching the way of compassion to Garuda who was the cause of terror for the race of snakes. He made Garuda give them nectar as well.
- Line 85. holy Brahmin : sage Viswamitra
- Line 132. them : Madhavi and Sutamati.

12. Worshipping Saint Aravana

(*Manimekalai*, along with *Madhavi* and *Sutamati*, meets *Aravana* at his retreat and acquaints him of her adventures so far. Saint *Aravana* tells them that he had met *Duhsaya* who lamented that his wives, *Tarai* and *Veerai*, had died. Now the ladies had taken another birth and come to him as *Madhavi* and *Sutamati* like dancers who have changed their dress. It is true *Buddha* had incarnated and shown the Right Way. But due to human lassitude, the Truth had become hidden. The gods would request *Buddha* to re-incarnate. He will do so, and then once again the world will be rid of all ills. Saint *Aravana* then proceeds to explain to her the One Supreme Law: Curing the Disease of Hunger).

Along with them, the girl enquired of people:

"Where stays the holy *Aravana*?"

Reaching the retreat of the ancient

Grey teacher who yet spoke in firm accents,

The dark-haired virgin bowed at his feet thrice

And worshipped him in the time-honoured way.

She spoke of her visit to the grove to him

And *Udayakumaran*'s words.

How Goddess *Manimekala* took her

And left her in *Manipallavam*.

Whither the Seat of the Enlightened One

Revealed to her all about her births past;

How the goddess unveiled the truth about

The maid's husband in an earlier birth.

"Your sisters *Tarai* and *Veerai*

Were enveloped by a dire fate

And have now joined you as *Madhavi*

And *Sutamati*: go now and request

The Saint *Aravana* about the ways

In which they can get illumination;"

Thus the goddess had spoken and given her

Three incantations: after her going,

10

20

Dipatilakai had come in a flash
 And approached her with loving kindness;
 She had helped the maid to gather at once
 The blessed vessel of kind *Aaputhran*;
 That lightning-bright divine lady had asked
 Her to learn of *Aaputhran* from the saint;
 Set on her way thus, she had come here
 To the sage: such was the maid's true story.
 When the wise teacher had listened to
Manimekalai, he was overjoyed.

30

"May the good in this golden girl increase!
 Learn from me the histories of these two;
 As the goddess told you, I was on that day
 Returning after worshipping the Seat
 Of bond-destroying *Buddha's* Feet.
 On my way was a lovely garden where
Duhsaya of *Kachaya* country was seen.
 'King with an immense cavalry power!
 Are you and your two wives keeping well?'
 I asked: heart-breakingly he lamented
 About the tragedy that befell them;
Veerai had gone in a drunken stupor
 Close to an untamed elephant and was killed;
Tarai flung herself from the balcony
 When she heard the dire news, and died too.

40

As the king spoke to me of his sorrows
 I took leave saying it is past *Karma*.
 Sorrow not. Have you come as dancers do
 In a different dress?" He spoke to them
 In the presence of *Manimekalai*
 Of their births past and continued further:
 "Thanks to your good deeds in the births past
 You have learnt of your yesterdays and *Dharma*.

50

Buddha embodying *Dharma* taught us
 Righteous living; but it prospered not
 And the way to liberation was barred
 By grass and thorns; the path of sin leading to evil
 Is open, traversed by ignorant men,
 As if that leads us to the dharmic goal.
 We have to recognise the russet sun

60

Which remains inclosed in layers of dew.
 It cannot be easily seen with eyes.
 The vast sheet of ocean-water cannot
 Go through the wire-pierced hole in the gem.
 But as the tiny droplets of water
 Which drip through, it is as yet possible
 To gain *dharma* in this world: mark my words.
 Wrapt in ignorance, men hear me not. 70
 All the godheads of the Temple of the Wheel
 Hastened to the *Tushitaloka* where they
 Bowed to the Lord in aspiration;
 In reply, like a Sun with many rays
 Appearing on a world of darkness,
 The Wise One will incarnate after
 A thousand and six hundred and sixteen
 Years: then will the teaching of *dharma*
 Stream as through a canal into a large
 Lake, pass through the small ear-holes of men 80
 Beneficent wisdom, bestowing joy.
 When the sun rises, the sun-stone reflects
 Brilliant sunlight; unlit minds of men
 Will receive the true illumination
 When the Sun of *Buddha* reveals himself.
 Then will the moon and the sun shine faultless
 And the planets keep an unfailing course;
 Rains will not fail; earth would be prosperous,
 Living things will have nothing to fear;
 Breeze will blow right-ward, mountains will prosper; 90
 The oceans bestow worthy goods to men;
 The cows will pour milk for calves and people;
 The birds having plenty, will not desert;
 Sentient creatures live in amity;
 Peace will come to the restless spirits of the dead;
 Mankind will have no deformed men or dwarfs,
 No dumb or deaf, no morons nor nitwits;
 They who are born when he incarnates
 And listen to him, gain liberation;
 Each of my births shall I spend in praising
 The feet of the Lord beneath the *Bodhi* 100
 Tree, O blessed being among women!

There are going to be omens about
 Happenings in this city, concerning you.
 Until after the events occur
 You will not benefit by *dharmic* teaching.
 These two ladies had worshipped the great Seat
 Of the Primal Lord's lotus feet in the past.
 Hence O maid! they in your company
 Will worship the holy feet of the *Buddha*
 Circumambulate the Seat and thereby
 Get released from the bonds of shadowing
Karma, and reach faultless Righteousness.
 You have received the life-giving vessel,
 Valuable *Amuda Surabhi*;
 I shall speak to you of the One Law
 Which is common to men and gods: that is
 'Curing the disease of hunger;' thus spake
 The venerable sage in words of wisdom.
 So inspired, the maid lifted the vessel
 To rid the world of the flames of hunger.

110

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- Line 1. them : Madhavi and Sutamati
 girl : Manimekalai
- Line 4. Although greatly advanced in age, with grey hair,
 Aravana spoke clearly and with significance.
- Line 14. the maid's
 husband : Rahulan
- Lines 50-51. Addressed to the ladies together.
- Line 72. Tushitaloka : one of the six worlds of devas
 in the Chakravala, the Buddhist
 cosmos.
- Lines 76-78. Scholars have not been able to establish the time
 referred to in these lines. However, they obviously
 refer to a future incarnation of the Buddha.
- Line 93. Birds will not need to migrate across long distances
 in search of water.

13. The Life of Aaputhran

(Saint Aravana begins recounting the story of Aaputhran. Sali, the wife of Apanjika, a brahmin of Varanasi, took to adultery and became pregnant. She left for Cape Comorin. On the way Aaputhran was born. She abandoned the baby and went away. A cow guarded him until the brahmin Ilamputhi took him home and brought him up. When grown to manhood, he released a sacrificial cow out of pity and moved out of the village. The Brahmins caught him and beat him up. The cow gored the leader of the brahmins and ran away. The brahmins jeered at Aaputhran when he tried to speak of cow-sacrifice as folly. One of the brahmins then said that he had met Sali recently and had learnt of Aaputhran's ignominious birth. At this, even Ilamputhi spurned the boy. Aaputhran went to Maturai and stayed in the temple of Chinta Devi. He begged for his food at day time, shared it with helpless and sick beggars, and slept in the temple at night).

"Hearken to the life of Aaputhran
 Who gave the great vessel to gentle you.
 In Varanasi lived a brahmin
 Apanjika, teacher of the scriptures.
 His wife Sali became adulterous.
 Afraid of the evil to her husband
 She left for Cape Comorin in the South.
 Her time nearing, she was delivered
 Of a child at night, near a village.
 Heartless, she abandoned it in grove.
 Harkening to its cries, there came a cow,
 Comforted it by licking it all over
 And gushed forth its milk for seven days
 To assuage the orphaned babe's hunger.
 Passing by the garden was a brahmin,
 Ilamputhi of Vayanankatu
 Who heard the pitiful cry of the child
 And lifted it up, his eyes tearful.

'Not a cow's child but mine own!'; so laying
He prayed with his wife and took charge of the
babe.

20

'A son is born to us. May our
Tribe increase!' the couple exclaimed and went.
Ere the boy was given the holy thread
The brahmin taught him well all the scriptures.
With a firmness of intelligence

The boy learnt all the ways of the brahmins.
One day he strayed into a neighbouring
Brahmin home: he saw there sacrificial objects.
A colourful flower string around its horns,
Afraid of assault stood a cow

30

Mooing piteously, in deep fear
Like a deer caught in the fatal net,
Afraid of the arrow from pitiless hunters.
His heart shocked, the boy shed copious tears.

'I shall free this cow from fear. And so

I shall steal it and go away at night.'

With this thought he stood aside in hiding.

At night he left the place with the cow

And trudged pathways cobbled with sharp stones.

The brahmins and the guardians of the law

40

Began searching and caught him with the cow.

'You are no low-caste to steal the sacred

Cow for this desert path. Tell us the truth.

Untouchable wretch! You will be kicked out!'

So saying they beat him up mercilessly

With sticks; angered, the cow gored the teacher

Among them whose entrails came tumbling out,

And it ran away fast into the woods.

Aaputhran spoke to those assembled there:

'Do not torture others: listen to me.

50

Grazing in fields set apart for farming

The cow gives sweet and health-increasing milk

With loving kindness to people in this

Wide world from the very day they are born.

What have you against this creature? Tell me,

O brahmins versed in ancient scriptures!'

'In ignorance have you sought to deride

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The scriptures vouchsafed to us by the son
 Of Him who holds the triumphant golden disc;
 Frailty is your heart, and rightly are
 You known as a cow's son; never can you
 Be a brahmin's son!' they jeered wildly.
 'Achala was cow's son; *Sringi*, a deer's;
 A tiger's offspring, *Virinchi*; was not
 Famous *Kesakambala* a jackal's son?
 When you give plentiful praise to these saints
 As the progenitors of your caste,
 Where is stain for the caste traced to a cow,
 O beings, well read in the Vedas?'
 The boy said. One of the brahmins then spoke.
 'I know of this boy's birth: coming across
 A travel-weary brahmin lady,
 Sali by name, who was returning from
 Kumari-pilgrimage all by herself
 I asked her: 'Which is your native place?
 Whence your coming here?' That housewife
 Gave expression to her tale of sadness.
 'I was the wife of a Vedic teacher,
 A leading brahmin of Varanasi.
 Taking to evil ways un-brahminic,
 I became adulterous, lost my husband.
 Afraid of torture by my caste-people
 I joined some pilgrims to Kumari.
 While close to a cowherd village away
 From Korkai city of King Cheliyan,
 I was delivered of a child. Heartless,
 I left it in a grove close-by and came away.
 Where is deliverance for this evil woman?'
 She wept. This is the son of that lady.
 As it served no purpose, I kept silent.
 Do not touch him. He belongs to low caste.'
 Aaputhran gently smiled, full of meaning:
 'Listen to the origins of brahmins;
 The first two noble teachers of the Vedas
 Were the offspring of a dancing girl
 Who appeared before the Creator.
 Men with sacred thread! Can you deny this?

Then how can *Sali* be blamed?' he replied
And stood laughing at the Vedic brahmins.
His father, *Bhuti*, denied him entry.
'This lad is unworthy for brahmin homes.'
When the boy begged for food in the village
The brahmins filled his pot with stones: 'You cow-
thief'

The boy journeyed to *Maturai* in the South
Filled with people, rich beyond compare.
There in the temple of *Chinta Devi*
Built with superb artistry, the boy stayed
Keeping to the front hall: he would go out
With his begging bowl into the city
And make rounds of the charitable homes.
Then call out to 'the blind, the deaf, the lame,
The helpless and those struggling with sickness,'
Feed them with love, and himself eat the left overs.
Later, sleep with the vessel as a head-rest
Such was the life of *dharma's* guardian.

- | | | |
|----------|---|--|
| Line 1. | Aaputhran | : literally, son of a cow (Tamil as a cow) |
| Line 2. | gentle you | : Manimekalai |
| Line 23. | The holy thread is given to brahmin children when they are seven years old. The anxiety of Ilamputhi to make Aaputhran a scholar and the latter's precocity at learning the scriptures at a very tender age are indicated by this line. | |
| Line 30. | Afraid of injury | : the cow had sensed that it was meant for ritual sacrifice. |
| Line 58. | son | : Brahma |
| Line 59. | Lord Vishnu | |

- Line 63. Achala : a legendary character
 Stringi : son of Rishi Sameeka and a doe.
- Line 64. Virinchi : a sage
- Line 65. These are references to Saint Achitakesakambala
 in Buddhist texts (U.V.S. Iyer's Manimekalai, p.147).
- Line 85. Korkai : the ancient capital of the Pandyas.
- Line 94. Vasishtha and Agastya
- Line 95. dancing girl : the celestial danseuse, Tilottama.
- Line 96. Creator : Brahma
- Line 116. Chinta Devi : Goddess. Saraswati

14. On the Nature of the Vessel

(Saint Aravana continues Aaputhran's story. Once travellers came late at night to the temple and begged Aaputhran for food. He had nothing left with him and was sad. Goddess Chinta Devi appeared to him and gave him a divine vessel which could produce unlimited food. As Aaputhran performed charity with the help of this vessel, Lord Indra came to the earth and offered him boons. Aaputhran was satisfied with the work he was doing for the poor, and spurned Indra's offer. The god grew angry and sent copious rains down. There was now plenty everywhere and no one needed Aaputhran's charity. He journeyed to Savaka to help the people there for the country was suffering from drought. On the way, he was left alone in the Manipallavam island. Instead of keeping himself alive with the help of the vessel, he placed it in the Gomukhi lake and passed away. Just before his death, he had related his life's events to Saint Aravana).

"In that Hall one day a precious vessel
Was given to him. Listen, O good maid!
It was rainy season and dark midnight.
A few travel-weary people came
To the Hall, and woke up the sleeping lad.
'We suffer pangs of hunger,' they complained.
Except for what he begged, he saved no grain
And hence unable to feed them, he grew sad.
Listen, girl! May your evil depart!
The Goddess who is the light of wisdom
Of the artistic temple whom all worship
Appeared saying: 'Be done with your grief!
My boy, get up and receive this vessel.
Even if drought stalk the land, this bowl
Will not become empty: the receiving hand
May grow tired but the bowl will not lack.'
She then gave him the vessel in her hand.
'Goddess of Wisdom! The light eternal
Of this temple of art! Divine Knowledge!

Leader of gods! First among earth's people!
Remove the sufferings of these men!' He prayed
Bowling and worshipping the Goddess.

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He then assuaged the hunger of the men.
From now on he saved lives by giving food.

Men and animals and birds came as groups
And gathered round him. Their noises loudly
Resounded throughout as when birds gather
On a tree laden with fruit.

This deed of *dharmā* caused the shaking up
Of the white Seat of immortal *Indra*.

30

Taking the form of an old brahmin, --
Bent back, unsteady steps, walking stick in hand --
He appeared before the Saviour.

'I am *Indra*. What is your will?

Ask of me gifts as return for your charity.'

Like an innocent the lad laughed loudly
As if in derision, he would have him gone.

'The gods only know how to enjoy
In heaven, the results of earthly action.

O powerful King who is the lord of
Heaven where there are no austere saints,
Or charitable men guarding the helpless
Or people striving for liberation!

40

My divine vessel can remove hunger
And bring joy to pain-racked visages.
What else will the Lord of Gods give me --
Food to eat and clothes to wear, or maidens
Or anyone else to guard me safe?'

'While the Saviour's vessel creates food

Let there be none to receive from it.

50

Let there be plenty all over the world.

May the heavy rains bring prosperity.'

Such was *Indra*'s reaction to the lad

And this brought plentiful bounty to earth.

For twelve years the *Paṇḍyan* country

Had lost lives due to lack of showers.

Now the rains came and crops waxed rich.

As people forgot what dread hunger was,

The temple Hall where the kind One lived

Grew a stranger to the sounds of eating. 60
 Amorous men, maniacs and rejects,
 And those on pleasure trips gathered laughing
 To play marbles and dice, speak scandal,
 Marking a life devoid of all wants.
Aaputhran removed himself from the Hall
 And went in search of people needing help.
 'Who's this?' the public jeered at him.
 As there was none to recognise his worth
 Whose loving kindness had sought to serve men,
 He walked all alone like a rich man 70
 Whose wealth had all been lost in the sea.
 To him who was thus walking all alone
 A few men who came hither in a ship
 Made obeisance and said: 'In *Savaka*
 Land, rains have failed and countless lives are lost,
 'Methinks I should go there with my vessel
 Which is now fruitless as a spinister
 Lacking poor people to feed due to *Indra's* ire!
 He happily joined the mariners.
 One day the ocean was churned by a storm. 80
 The ship tarried at *Manipallavam*
 For a day. *Aaputhran* disembarked for a change.
 Thinking that he had got back to the ship,
 The vessel sailed away in the dark night.
 Saddened by the ship's abandoning him
 And as there was none in that vast island
 He mused: 'This bowl was meant to save people.
 I will not use it just to save my life.
 The effects of my past good deeds are gone.
 Why should I carry the bowl when alone?' 90
 He placed it in a lake of pure water,
Gomukhi: 'Appear annually once.
 Enter the hands of one who takes the vow
 Of bringing succour to the helpless!
 He said, gave up food and prepared for death.
 It was then that I went to him and asked:
 'What ails thee?' He described to me all that
 Had happened in his adventurous life.
 As the sun that rises in the East

15. Begging with the Bowl

(Saint Aravana continues with the story of Aaputhran. Aaputhran was reborn on Buddha's birthday to a cow cherished by saint Manmugan of Savaka. The earth was immediately blessed with a renaissance. The childless King of Savaka, Bhumichandra, took the child from Manmugan as a gift and brought him up in the palace. The child grew into the good Prince Punyaraja and succeeded Bhumichandra. Saint Aravana asks Manimekalai to aid the victims of hunger with the help of the vessel. The maid takes leave of him and goes out into the street. The citizens comment that it was a pity the object of a Prince's attentions should become a beggar. But Manimekalai is happy with her role. A Vidhyadhara woman, Kayachantikai, tells her that she should beg first from a chaste woman. Kayachantikai, herself is afflicted with the disease of endless hunger.)

"Hear more of this, O creeper-like girl!
 The cow that had suckled him in the past
 Reached in its next birth the Saint Manmugan
 Living on the snow-clad Savaka hills.
 It had golden horns and hooves, and was praised
 By everyone for its good nature.
 Even before calving, milk flowed from it
 With which it fed those around. The great saint
 Who could read the past, present and future
 Said: "Within its womb will incarnate
 A saviour, causing plentiful rains
 Who will guard all living things. Nor will he
 Be born circled by umbilical chord
 But will come out of a golden egg.'
 Even when not assailed by suffering
 Aaputhran cast off his body in the island
 To perform *dharmā*; as he didn't forget
 The cow that saved him, he was born to a cow
 Making gods happy, a hero in all
 This vast island which has sweet *jambu* fruits.

Thus he took birth and the world worshipped him.
 Listen to the Saviour's coming!
 In summer when the sun is at the hottest,
 Under the fourteenth star which is at the centre
 Of the whole number, like unto *Buddha*
 Whose birth star it was, the Kind One took birth.
 The rains came down all over the world
 And the torrents carried flower-petals;
 'The season is like unto the sacred
 Hour when *Buddha* was born. Marvellous!' 30
 So said the holy men performing
 Austerities in the Temple of the Wheel.
 They went to the image of the goddess
 At midnight saying: 'If the goddess is pleased
 We would know the truth.' From her came the words:
 'He who had died at *Manipallavam*
 Is born in *Savaka* for saving lives.
 Saint *Aravana* knows his life story.'
 Thus she made me speak. Hear what follows:
 The King of the country bowed to the sage 40
Manmugan and said: 'I have no children.
 By your grace I now receive this child.'
 He brought up the boy who showed kingly
 Qualities and succeeded *Bhumichandra*
 To become the King of the *Savaka* land.
 Haṣ *Indra* missed his sacrificial offerings?
 Is our *dharmaic* King grown unrighteous?
 Even though the *Kaveri* richly streams,
 There is no aid for the land. Drought is come
 And lives are struggling to breathe, O maiden! 50
 The nectar given by the white-maned sea
 Was drunk by gods who hid what was left.
 You should not keep idle the life-giving
 Bowl like that, and cease to help human beings.'
 Thus spoke the Saint. Along with her mothers
Manimekalai worshipped him. Holding
 The divine vessel in her hands she went
 To the main road in the garb of a nun.
 Soon there came many: ignorant idlers,
 Lust-driven amorous youth, ruffians; 60

Like those who surrounded the minister
Yaugandharayana when he assumed
 The form of an old man who pranced around --
 So incongruous the disguise! -- to release
Vathsa, King of *Kausambi* who had been
 Treacherously imprisoned by the enemy,
 They spoke sadly: 'It is a pity that
 The lovely girl who once ravished the heart
 Of *Udayakumaran* should today
 Walk abroad with a begging bowl in hand.' 70
 But she who was *Madhavi's* daughter
 Now walked the streets where lived wedded couples,
 Her heart springing with a rare happiness:
 'It is proper to beg from a chaste wife
 First.' A voice announced: 'As in a lotus pool
 Shines forth the tallest and loveliest bloom,
 Among these chaste women who cause rain to fall
 Is the pure *Aadirai*, the most gracious;
 This is her house; kindly step in, O maid!'
 So spoke the woman *Kayachantikai*, 80
 Who was born in the *Vidhyadhara* land
 In North, and had been cursed due to dire fate
 By the great saint on the banks of a stream
 Flowing from the *Potikai* hill in the South
 To wander about suffering deeply
 The scalding pangs of an endless hunger.

Line 2. him : Aaputhran

Line 8. the great
 saint : Manmugan

Lines 15-17. Aaputhran's sole desire was to be born again among
 people and continue his charitable works.

Line 25. Buddha's star was Visakha.

16. Aadirai Gives Alms

(*Kayachantikai* tells *Manimekalai* about *Aadirai's* life. *Aadirai's* husband *Saduvan* had lost his money to a courtesan and sailed away in search of a fortune. His ship sank and he was reported dead. *Aadirai* wished to commit *suttee*. But a voice assured her of *Saduvan's* safety. *Saduvan* was thrown by the waves on an island where he converted the *Naga* chief to *Buddha's Dharma*. Enriched by the presents given by the *Naga* chief *Saduvan* returned to *Aadirai* in *Kaveri-p-poompattinam* and they lived together happily. *Aadirai* places food into *Amuda Surabhi* held by *Manimekalai* and the vessel now begins to give forth food).

The *Vidhyadhara* maid then spoke to her
 Of what befell the lady *Aadirai*.
 "Lovely girl, listen. *Aadirai's* husband
 Was *Saduvan* who took to evil ways
 And left his wife. Attracted by the food
 Ladled out by a courtesan, he gave
 Her enormous wealth through evil gambling.
 In time he lost his entire capital.
 That woman showed him now other rich men,
 Declared him insolvent and bid him bye.
 Eager to rebuild his fortunes he joined
 Some merchants setting sail across the seas.
 A cyclone destroyed his ship. He held on
 To the mast and was flung forward by waves
 Till he reached the shore skirting a mountain
 Where lived a *Naga* tribe that roamed naked.
 His shipmates who had also saved themselves
 From the wreck, returned to their home—*Pukar*.
 They said: 'At midnight our ship was wrecked.
 Along with many others *Saduvan*
 Too was drowned, alas!' When good *Aadirai*
 Heard these words she cried out aloud and wept:
 'O citizens! Won't you all come forward
 To prepare my funeral pyre?' She went
 To the crematorium where was dug,

10

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A pit, filled with dry wood and set alight.

'I shall join my husband where he goes
Fate-impelled,' she said and entered the pyre.

Her funeral bed would not catch the flame.

Nor her garment. The sandal-paste on her

30

And the flowers on her flowing tresses

Did not change colour. She shone brilliant

Like the goddess of wealth seated upon

The sweet-scented lotus exuding grace.

'Ah me! Are my woes irredeemable

That even fire kills me not?' She cried.

Then came a voice resounding from heavens.

'Aadirai, hear. Your husband was

Led by ocean-waves to the mountain side

40

Where he has joined the Naga tribesmen.

He will not be there for many years.

He is sure to return in the ship

Of the merchant *Chandradatta*. You too

Will be freed of this terrible sorrow.'

Aadirai's kohl-lined eyes now ceased to weep.

As one comes after bathing in a lake

She returned home, her mind cleared of doubts.

Praying for the return of her husband

She performed good deeds. The chaste wives who
have

50

The power to will clouds to pour down rain

Praised her as a serene sublime lady.

There her husband at the foot of the hill

Reached an uprising tree for restful shade.

Tired by what he had gone through in the sea

He slept; the uncultured Naga tribesmen

Came upon him and drew close chattering.

'This man has suffered grievously. He has

Come here all alone. Deserves pity.

His body is fleshy.' They woke him up.

As he knew their language they harmed him not.

60

Listening to him, they even greeted

And conversed with him. They told him thus:

'Worthy stranger, hear us. Our Lord

Stays close by. You'd better go to him.'

They led him then to their worshipful king.
 The leader held court along with his spouse
 Looking like a bear and its female
 In that stage spread with dried blood and bleached
 bones

Where the stench of blood and wine was quite thick.
 But language brought the merchant good friendship.
 He sat in a shade with the tribal chief.

70

'How come you have reached this land of ours?'
Saduvan spoke of his sea-borne travails.

'He has suffered much the pangs of hunger
 On the sea and needs our help. Come all!
 Give this young man a lovely tribal girl,
 Warm wine and plenty of meat!' The chief said.
 Poor *Saduvan* was shocked by these words.

'I heard evil words. I do not want them.'
 Angered, the chief shouted: 'Is there something
 Good for mankind beyond woman and food?

80

If there is show us the same and we too
 Shall be benefitted! Speak out! The merchant
 Replied: 'The discerning have rejected
 Mind-boggling wine and the killing of life.

The death of those who are born and the birth
 Of those dead is like sleeping and waking.
 As we know that those who do good deeds reach
 The heavens and the rest fail in deep hell
 The wise have rejected these two evils.

90

Know it to be so! The chief laughed loudly.
 'You say that the life that leaves the body
 Holes up elsewhere taking another form.
 How can the life do so? Detail it well.'

Saduvan was not angered by this.

'When life is within the body it feels
 What happens to it. But when life withdraws
 It is unaware of even being burnt.
 Thus you know of life which had fled from hence.
 Not me alone but all discerning men

100

Know that there is a new place to return
 For the lives of the dead. Our body
 Lies here, but life moves, beyond distances

In dreams. So they enter bodies fashioned
 According to earlier deeds. Know this!
 The killer-eyed *Naga* bowed at the feet
 Of the wise merchant. 'It is not henceforth
 Possible for me to conceive living
 Without wine and fresh meat. Teach me the way
 Of good living until dissolution 110
 Claims my body which is nature's law.'
 'You speak good words. Follow the right path hence.
 I shall show you an appropriate way.
 Should ship-wrecked strangers come to this mountain
 Do not eat them. But save their precious lives.
 Avoid violence towards any life.
 Eat only animals that have died of old age.'
 The humble chief agreed: 'This suits us well.
 This shall be our law. Take those riches.
 In the past we ate ship-wrecked mariners. 120
 All these are their wealth. Help yourself
 To these expensive wood, gauze-like garments
 And various precious things.' *Saduvan* compiled.
 When *Chandradatta's* vessel came that side
 He got in and returned to this city.
 Here he lives with his chaste good wife
 Spending his well-earned wealth in charity.
 O lovely lady! Accept the first alms
 From the hands of renowned *Aadirai*.
Manimekalai repaired to that home 130
 And stood at the entrance like a painting.
Aadirai came out; went round the lady,
 Spoke words that chase away sorrow, and gave
 Alms that was like life-giving medicine.
 "The whole world be free of hunger!" She blessed.

Line 1. *Vidhyadhara*
 maid : *Kayachantikai*

Line 16. For the various *Naga* tribes in India and Ceylon,
 see *V.Kanakasabhai*, *Tamils 1800 Years Ago*, p. 39 ff.

- Line 52. there : in the Naga country
- Line 70. This was possible because Saduvan knew the Naga
language.
- Line 71. tribal chief : He is known as 'guru-magan,'
and hence probably combined
secular and religious power.
- Line 131. Manimekalai stood still as a painting since silence
was to be observed by monks and nuns when receiving
food given in charity.

17. In the Assembly Hall

(As soon as *Aadirai* places food into it, the *Amuda Surabhi* begins to produce large quantities of food. *Kayachantikai* then recounts her past to *Manimekalai*. She had been disporting with her husband in the Southern hills with her husband *Kanchanan* and had accidentally desecrated the solitary fruit that had been the sole means of subsistence for the sage *Vrichika*. Cursed by him to suffer pangs of endless hunger, she had come to *Kaveri-p-poompattinam* for this was one city that would never say no to anyone begging a meal. *Manimekalai* gives her food. Cured of her hunger, *Kayachantikai* directs *Manimekalai* to go to the Assembly Hall in the Temple of the Wheel and feed the hungry people who come there).

Seeing how the alms-vessel received food
 From the chaste wife and released mounds of meal
 Much as the wealth of an honest worker
 Continues to increase to help others,
 And how hands grew tired receiving, yet
 The divine pot continued to produce,
Kayachantikai ' sick with appetite
 That could not be rid of, bowed to the good girl.
 "When the Lord in a swoon was born on earth
 And reached the sea to build a bridge, monkeys
 Dropped large hills there that vanished in a trice.
 The divine ocean received all the stones.
 Such a fiery hunger stalks me now
 Due to my past deeds. Hear, O Mother!
 Saviour-physician to hungering souls!
 Relieve me of this terrible disease!"
 With guardian-grace she took a handful
 And placed the food on the outstretched hands.
 The other woman was presently rid
 Of her morbid hunger. So she prayed then:
 "I hail from Northern *Kanchanapura*
 Which is found on the silvery mountain.
 Led by fate I journeyed to the southern

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Potikai, with my Vidhyadhara mate.
 On the sands of a forest stream fed by
 Powerful water-falls, we roamed in joy.
 Vrichika, a sage with holy thread
 And flowing tresses came walking that side.
 He placed on a teak leaf a *jambu* fruit
 As big as the biggest found 30
 In a bunch on a healthy palm; he then went on
 To bathe in a lake full of scented blooms.
 My evil fate made me walk carelessly
 In my pleasure; ah! my feet crushed the fruit.
 Vrichika returned eager for 'his meal
 And found me with the fruit, now all spoilt.
 'This belongs to a divine *jambu* tree.
 Gives a single fruit once in twelve years.
 He who eats it, for the coming years twelve
 Is freed from hunger that stalks mortal men. 40
 My vow is such that I eat only once
 In these twelve years. You have crushed the fruit!
 May you lose the chant that gets you air-borne!
 Suffer with unquenchable appetite
 For twelve years. Only when I eat next
 The fruit, relief for you!' Such was his curse.
 Perhaps today was set for my relief.
 Young maid! You ended my hunger-disease.
 My mate who had vanished in great fear
 From the mountain with roaring water-falls 50
 Now returned in sadness after the sage
 Had gone away, suffering from hunger.
 'For no reason you have incurred the curse
 Of a dread disease! Fly now in the air!'
 'I have forgotten the chant! Already
 A life-killing hunger gnaws me within
 Burning my entrails!' Immediately
 He gathered sweet fruits, roots, vegetables
 All fresh and well grown and brought them to me.
 Seeing me hungering still, he sorrowed. 60
 He then spoke to me compassionate words.
 'In Tamil Nadu within *Jambu* island
 Is a strong city where live rich men,

Fearless, who are all beneficent,
 Whose vow is to help the weak and the poor.
 Though it would mean many days, walk on earth
 And reach that city.' Such was his advice.
 I came here and live in this *Pukar*.
 On each festival season to *Indra*
 He comes to this lovely, majestic town 70
 Sees me suffer endless pangs of hunger
 Mourns, counts the years to go still, and returns.
 You save me from this. My salutations.
Manimekalai! I now return home.
 There is a Temple of the Wheel that saves
 Men from sorrow; there live pure sages.
 Within is an Assembly Hall that has
 Many entrances; hungry pilgrims from
 Distant lands and the helpless who have no
 Guardians, gather in this self-same place. 80
 They will all be looking for charity.
 Go there, O maid, lovely with parted tresses!"
 Then she flew away. Our youthful maid
 Walked on one side of *Pukar's* major road.
 She saluted the Assembly Hall thrice;
 Getting up into the Assembly Hall
 She saluted thrice the temple
 Of the ancient goddess, revered by all.
 She also bowed to the pillar-statue
 Who tells human beings the cause of their birth. 90
 Like heavy rains to a forest that burns
 In hot sun with all its dried bamboo clumps
 The damsel came with the nectar-vessel
 Among the crowd suffering hunger-pangs.
 "This is *Aaputhran's* nectar-vessel. Come,
 All of you who need food!" The Assembly
 Of the city with ever-new riches
 Echoed to the sounds of crowds having their meals.

Lines 7-8. *Kayachantikai's* sickness is known as *yanai-thee* (elephant fire; Skt. *Bhasmaka* sickness).

- Line 9. Lord in swoon : Vishnu who is in a yogic trance,
reclining on the milky ocean.
- Line 10. born on earth : incarnated as Rama
- bridge : built by the monkeys to connect
India and Lanka, the capital of
Ravana.
- Line 17. she : Manimekalai
- Line 70. he : Kanchanan, the consort of Kaya-
chantikai.

18. Udayakumaran Comes to the Assembly Hall

(*Manimekalai's* going amidst beggars infuriates her grandmother *Chitrapati*. She complains to *Udayakumaran* that he must not be a passive spectator. *Udayakumaran* speaks of Goddess *Manimekala's* advice that rulers should exercise self-control. *Chitrapati* brushes aside his doubts. *Udayakumaran* goes to the Assembly Hall and confronts *Manimekalai*. Finding him impervious to words of moral wisdom, the maid enters the temple of *Sambapathi* and takes on the form of *Kayachantikai* to escape the Prince's attentions. Non-plussed, the Prince decides to stay on in the Assembly Hall and meet *Manimekalai*).

When *Chitrapati* heard this, she flared up,
 Her heart bursting bounds with boiling fury
 As when an iron rod, all heated up
 Is thrust into a wound defying cure.
 "I shall end this drama," she vowed, shaken
 To the assembled group of courtesans.
 "After *Kovalan's* death *Madhavi* had
 Entered the nunnery. Has not this caused
 Laughter? The discerning of this city
 Have found it cause enough to speak our shame.
 We are no chaste wives from noble houses
 Who when their husbands die and themselves live
 Are disgusted with their life.
 So they enter the flaming pyre as if
 Moving into the waters of a cool lake.
 Our income is from the wealth of many.
 We are like a lute that is not destroyed
 When the lutanist dies; also, like the
 Bee which moves away from the bloom
 Emptied of honey, as in times of loss
 The goddess of wealth abandons humans
 We give up men when they are of no worth.
 Is it not a matter of shame for us
 When we accept the garments of a nun?
 The creeper *Manimekalai* born to

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Madhavi has now bloomed: a royal bee,
Udayakumaran wants to join
That bloom with a single mind. To help him
I shall throw away her begging vessel
In the midst of the wretched begging crowd. 30
If I do not have Manimekalai
Brought here on the royal chariot
I may be banished from dancing houses
Condemned to live as a maid of ill-repute
And made to carry burnt bricks on my head
Around the dancing hall!" Such indeed was
Her dread vow. Sighing deep hotted up breaths
She thought out a logical argument.
Followed by chosen bejewelled maidens
Her lovely face fringed by small beads of sweat 40
She walked on the road where moved chariots,
And reached the palace of the royal prince.
Where the beetles buzz with honey bees
In a rich corner spread well with fresh sand,
Is a marble-hall brilliantly lit,
Made of golden walls and coral pillars,
With an artistic ceiling pearl in laid.
Here, on a couch held up by lions
Reclined, the prince fanned by lovely damsels
With yak-tails as milky as foam-white waves. 50
Him she saluted and praised. With a laugh
That discovered his ordered teeth he asked:
"Is Madhavi's renunciation
And that of Manimekalai proceeding faultless?"
"The swaying creeper has given birth
To a priceless jewel, a waist-girdle.
Ripe and lovely, that jewel is welcomed
By the art of dancing in our land
Rich with music and poetic lore. 60
To help the bee, Udayakumaran,
Taste the bloom have I come; that can be found
In the ruined Hall beyond the city.
Sword-wielder! May your flowers stay fresh!"
As if a ship-wrecked sailor on the seas
Gains a beat, the prince spoke to the lady:

"I took the statue in the marble hall
 For an artist's triumph. But ere I left
 I found her rosy hands binding the breasts
 Tightening ever so slightly. A smile
 Blossomed in between the coral-red lips 70
 Revealing pearl-white teeth, like the honey
 My heart desired to drink, and even thus
 A new life and with it hope entered me.
 Her large eyes that were like water-lilies
 And rivalled sharp spears and darkling fish
 Looked sideways to make me understand that
 The maid's heart had certainly left her side.
 That jewel-like girl in the marble hall
 Has taken away my heart and saved my life
 And hid herself! I kept awake till midnight. 80
 There came before me a golden woman.
 Asking me to rule well she advised me
 To forget the maiden who had renounced
 Was she a goddess? A divine being?
 Since then have I been in this endless swoon!"
 Chitrapati laughed a little and said:
 "Young prince, forget that incident. Have not
 Even the gods lost their heads over love
 Many times over, if we begin to count?
 The lord of the immortals received shame 90
 And a thousand eyes, for a sage's wife.
 The fire-god lusted for the chaste wives
 Of the seven great sages on the banks
 Of lake Saravana, fed by Meru's streams;
 His wife then assumed the form of the wives
 Seven and ended her husband's desire.
 Yet you speak of divine commands, O Prince!
 She was not born for familial life
 Where maidenhood and wifhood are guarded
 And also widowhood by those around; 100
 Those chaste women do not glance at strangers.
 For them their husband is greater than god.
 In public view our dancing women
 Spread their music, dance and beauty on the stage,
 Send forth the net of their long-lashed eyes

Into the hearts of the men who look on
 To help Cupid work with his bow and arrow
 And with sweet words take away their riches
 Leaving them bee-like, when they are poor.
 Is it not the right duty of a Prince
 To order them into their profession?" 110
Udayakumaran's heart got confused.
 Ascending a chariot with swift horses
 He went to the Hall where the maiden was.
 Like the Goddess of the Battle-Ground feeding
 Hungry spirits out of a skull, he saw
 The maiden with the vessel giving food
 To crowds suffering from infernal hunger.
 His love burst the bounds of self-control.
 "I will go ask this lonely girl myself. 120
 'Dearest thief who has stolen my heart
 By entering within me all of you!
 Why have you so willingly accepted
 This ascetic life, these weeds of the nun?"
 He went close to her and asked: 'Good woman!
 What is the reason for this askesis?
 Tell me!' Such was his confident query.
 "This was my lord *Rahulan*: it is meet
 For me to salute him." And so she did.
 "How can I speak ill even if my heart 130
 Goes to him uncontrolled and he decided
 To catch my hand! It is not right for me
 To reject my beloved!" So she trembled.
 "If you would listen to discerning words
 I shall certainly answer your doubts.
 Birth, ageing, torture by sickness,
 Death: such is this holder-vase of sorrows.
 Having learnt the nature of this body
 I desired to walk the path of *dharma*.
 What wisdom can ladies impart to you, 140
 A pachyderm that destroys enemies?
 You have heard me. Be willed to right action."
 The gentle girl went away from the Prince
 And entered the Gurjara-style temple,
 The residence of the ancient goddess.

"Who can foretell what men may do?" she thought
 And prayed to her adorned with fresh garlands.
 Repeating the magic chant that gave her
 The form of the maid *Kayachantikai*,
Manimekalai returned to the front.

150

The prince drew near but recognised her not.
 To the Gurjara-temple deity he vowed:
 "Among the statuettes how shall I find
Manimekalai who has hid herself

After handing over the begging pot
 To the hungry *Kayachantikai*?

If you will not point her out to me
 I shall stay here for all time to come.
 Hear me some more, immortal maiden!

160

Her pearly teeth within coral lips,
 Long fish-eyes that have not been *kohl*-painted,
 Her bent eyelashes that are divided mid way,
 Sharp nose, several bends in her body,
 Breasts pointed, she stood fully arrayed.

My guardians of knowledge withdrew from me.
 With the lute of her voice she spoke so gently
 Words of great import. As if she had won
 A new elephant, she made me all hers.

Ancient Goddess! Unless you give back
Manimekalai who entered this place

170

I shall not go: this my vow as I touch
 Thy feet: grant me relief," the Prince pronounced.

| | | |
|---------|------------|---|
| Line 1. | Chitrapati | : Manimekalai's grandmother |
| | this | : the act of Manimekalai attending to the beggars in the Assembly Hall. |
| Line 5. | drama | : referring to Manimekalai's going about Pukar's streets with a begging bowl. |
| Line 7. | Kovalan | : Manimekalai's father |

Line 16, many : many rich men

Lines 35-36. It was a tradition to punish dancing girls who went against the norms of their profession by making them go round the dancing hall with seven bricks loaded on their head.

 lions : carved lions supported the royal seat.

Lines 55 ff. A play on the names of Madhavi (also the name of a flowering creeper) and Manimekala! which literally means 'a jewelled waist-girdle.'

Line 61. that : that bloom (here, Manimekalai)

Line 68. literally, hands held akimbo

Line 81. golden woman : goddess Manimekala

Lines 90-92. Indra, smitten by love, ravished Ahalya, the wife of sage Gautama. The Rishi cursed the god to develop a thousand eyelets all over his body.

Lines 92-96. Agni was once overcome by love for the wives of the seven great rishis. His wife, Swaha Devi, took the form of the wives of the sages (except Arundhati) and thus satisfied her husband's desire.

Line 111. them : the dancing girls

Lines 115-116. Durga, deity of the battle-zones is said to feed her army of spirits with the blood and flesh scattered on the battle-field.

Line 128. Manimekalai recognises Udayakumaran to have been her husband Rahulan in an earlier birth.

Lines 144-145. Evidently the temple to Goddess Sambapathi had been fashioned in the Gurjara style, famous for its

sculptural artistry from ancient times.

Lines 148-150. One of the chants taught her by Goddess Manimekala enabled Manimekalai to assume the form she wanted.

Line 151. The Prince could not recognise her as Manimekalai looked like Kayschantikai.

Line 159. immortal
maiden : Goddess Sambapathi

Line 165. lit : the Prince became devoid of common-sense.

Lines 167-168. The Prince insinuates that Manimekalai had hunted him (the elephant) with the implements for elephant-trapping like the beauties of her body, speech and wisdom.

19. Prison Becomes Refuge

(When *Udayakumaran* vows before the Goddess that he will not leave the place till he gets *Manimekalai*, the Pillar-statue chides him for desecrating the temple precincts with such words. Awe-struck, the Prince returns to his palace, telling himself that he would get at the mystery later on: *Manimekalai*, in *Kayachantikai* form, goes to the city prison and feeds the inmates. The guards inform King *Mavankilli* of the *Vidhyadhara* lady and her miracle vessel. The King summons the maid. On *Manimekalai*'s request, he transforms the prison into a haven for charitable purposes).

As the Prince with fresh garlands took the vow
 After saluting the feet of the goddess,
 A divine spirit hid in a statue
 Cunningly fashioned by an artist, said:
 "Young man! In the presence of the Goddess
 You have spoken wrong words in thoughtless pride.
Udayakumaran was much troubled,
 Like one thrown in a dark, air-less dungeon,
 "It was a divine being that warned me:
 'Forget the maid and live righteously!"
 Divine too the vessel the maid carried
 To satisfy the hunger of the crowds:
 This statue that warns, 'You have wronged by words
 The ancient Goddess,' is divine too.
 I will learn the truth about this later
 In the maid's work," he told himself and went.
 Night followed him like a black elephant,
 Keeperless, its forehead the evening,
 The crescent-moon its tusk, desire its trunk,
 Flower-scent its ichor, wind-swift, fearsome,
 Evening drums sounding its triumphant march
 As it had defeated the King of Day
 And made the enormous earth food for night.
 The sweet tunes of the *Makara*-lute strings
 Expertly plucked by the town's young couples

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Pierced his heart like a sharp-edged iron.
 Sighing like a black-smith's red-hot furnace
 He went, his uncontrolled heart all a-flame.
Manimekalai, maid of pure action.

In her changed form within the temple, thought:

30

"The Prince will not give me up if I move
 In public halls as *Madhavi's* daughter."

So she continued with the hungering
Kayachantikai form well known to all,
 Living as the saviour of the helpless.

"It is the right duty of the mendicants
 To beg and serve the needy on their own.
 Such is the instruction of the wise teachers."

Deciding thus, she took the nectar-pot
 In the niche of the ancient Goddess.

40

The maid journeyed in *Pukar* city
 And willingly reached the prison-house where
 Those who disobey the royal commands
 Are kept in deep sorrow and sharp hunger.

Here she fed the hungering inmates
 Till their hands grew tired of receiving.
 The guards wondered at the single vessel
 That gave so much, and hastened to the King
 To tell him all about the charity

From the vessel, and the work of the maid.

50

The King had gone to the royal garden
 With his queen, *Seerthi*. She was the daughter
 Of *Mahabali's* nephew. The same King
 With the big, strong bow, who gifted away
 When *Vishnu* incarnated as the Dwarf
 And regained his form to measure the worlds.

Our King enjoyed the flower garden
 Where the beetles on the branches fluted,
 The bees sounded like strings of a lute,
 The nightingales sang and the peacocks danced.

60

In a corner with a swan sans its mate
 Danced a peacock and its hen in rhythm
 Going round and round, their large wings unfurled:
 The gracious King watched the sight with pleasure,
 As if it were the dance of Lord *Krishnu*

With his elder brother and *Nappinnai*.
 The sight of a spangled peacock
 Close to a mango near a flower
 Appeared as though a lovely maid was feeding
 A parrot with milk from a golden plate. 70
 He laughed to see a male monkey swinging
 Its mate seated on the bejewelled swing
 Specially erected for lovely girls
 Within the garden full of flowering trees.
 The closeness of bamboo clumps with green leaves
 To the *katamba* tree with white blossoms
 Made him salute with his hands and worship:
 "Here is *Krishna* with his elder brother."
 With dancers who knew the art of miming,
 Scholars expert in dramatic epics, 80
 Lutanists well trained to pluck music notes,
 Capable beaters on the drums' two sides,
 Tuners aligning the flute and the human voice,
 Group singers of enjoyable ballads,
 Bead-stringers repairing pearl-necklaces,
 Appliers of dry sandalwood powder,
 Women painting their breasts with red colour,
 Garland-makers weaving lotus petals,
 Hair-dressers applying scented smoke to tresses,
 And women watching themselves in mirrors 90
 Of burnished gold, he disported himself
 Like the heavenly lord of all the gods.
 Smilingly he walked, halting near plants
 Like wild-lime, jasmine, *cherunti* with blooms,
Mullai bushes and trees with dark flowers.
 He called out to the short mongoose, long-eared
 Hare, leaping gazelles and the forest goat
 To come near, and with his gracious hand
 Pointed them out to his happy queen.
 He continued to play with the help of 100
 Cupid, the spring season and the gentle breeze,
 At the fountains and man-made rockeries,
 Water-falls, rooms of flowering creepers,
 Vast lakes, wells ingeniously hidden,
 Obscure corners, rest-halls made of marble --

Everywhere he roamed and grew tired.
Magadhan jewellers, *Mahratta* goldsmiths,
Avanti's blacksmiths, foreign carpenters
 And Tamil artisans had worked as one
 To produce the grand royal seating place 110
 With coral legs and bejewelled pillars,
 Its pearl-strung ceiling with proper angles
 Gracefully structured by expert builders.
 On to this palace with its golden roof-top
 And golden floor stranger to common cleaning pastes,
 He ascended, verily an *Indra*.
 The guards informed the door-keepers, and bowed.
 With the king's leave, they saluted and said:
 "You wore rattan reeds after defeating
 The *Vanji* King, as you desired more earth. 120
 With elephants, chariots, cavalry,
 Sword-lashing infantry and advance guards
 The *Chera* and *Pandya* Kings had hastened
 To war with you: on the banks of *Kari*
 You had got their flags through your brother
 Who wears *athi* leaves! O *Mavankilli*,
 Brave-shouldered King with the white umbrella!
 May you live with fame for all time to come!
 Hail our Lord, who is charitable!
 May your enemies perish: Listen! 130
 A stranger woman who was suffering
 From hunger-diseases and was roaming around
 Entered the inner rooms of the prison.
 O famous King! She praised your greatness.
 With a solitary mendicant's pot
 She distributed food for all inmates.
 Hail you, our King for all time to come!"
 As they spoke thus, the gracious-hearted King
 Directed them: "Bring at once the young maid
 To this place!" Accompanied by the guards, 140
 The maid reached the royal presence and said:
 "All hail to the graciousness of the King!"
 "Who are you who has taken to such hard
 Ascetic living? From whence this vessel?"
 To the King's queries the young girl replied:

"Hail to you, wearer of scented garlands.
 I am a *Vidhyadhara* maid. I have roamed
 This festival-clad town due to a curse.
 Hail! May rains fall and crops increase their yield!
 May you be safe from evil! This indeed
 Is a begging vessel given to me
 By a goddess in the Hall: it is divine.
 It brought a cure to my hunger-sickness.
 This is medicine to hungry human beings."
 "Can I help you, young woman?" The King asked.
 The gentle girl said: "Pull down the prison,
 And build there a refuge for charity
 Housing wise, good-hearted people." At once
 As the maid had wanted, the King ordered
 The prison to be cleared of dodgers
 Of tax, and housed it with good people
 So as to greatly benefit *Pukar*.

150

160

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- Line 2. Goddess : Goddess Sambapathi
- Line 3. The pillar-statue or 'Kandir Paval'
- Line 9. divine being : Goddess Manimekala
- Lines 15-16. i.e., by watching the maid's charitable works.
- Lines 17 ff. One of the finest epic similes employed by Sathanar.
- Line 22. King of day : the Sun
- Line 30. Refers to her changed form as *Kayachantikai*.
- Line 53. Mahabali's nephew : literally, a descendant of Mahabali, the mythological King from whom Vishnu, in his incarnation as Vamana, begged for three spans of earth.

- Line 66. elder : Balarama. Krishna, Balarama
 brother and Krishna's wife Nappinnai
 are said to have danced
 holding hands with one another
 in Dwaraka. The dance is
 known as Kuravai.
- Lines 67-70. The peacock is compared to a maid, the mango
 to a parrot and the flower to a golden plate.
- Lines 75-78. The dark bamboo clumps and the white blossoms
 of the Katamba tree appeared as if the dark-hued
 Krishna and fair-complexioned Balarama were
 standing together. The illusion brought out the
 devotional piety of the King.
- Line 92. i.e., like Indra
- Line 115. i.e., it was cleaned only with scented sandal
- Lines 119-120. As a symbol of having defeated the Vanji King,
 whose royal insignia was the rattan reed.
- Line 131. The guards have naturally mistaken Manimekalai
 for Kayachantikai as the latter had been a familiar
 beggar in Pukar for the last twelve years.

20. Kanchanan Kills Udayakumaran

(The transformation of the prison-house into a house of refuge under *Manimekalai's* directions excites the Prince's imagination. He goes to the Assembly Hall to meet her. *Kanchanan* comes here in search of *Kayachantikai* and goes to *Manimekalai* mistaking her identity and asks her to return with him. She moves towards *Udayakumaran* and speaks on the impermanence of youth. *Kanchanan* is incensed and hides himself. *Udayakumaran* guesses that this maid is *Manimekalai* and goes away. He returns at night to get at truth. *Kanchanan* comes out of his hiding place and kills him. The pillar-statue tells *Kanchanan* of his mistake and that his beloved *Kayachantikai* was already dead. The *Vidhyadhara* goes away in sorrow).

Thanks to the good maiden, the King's order
 Freed the prisoners from infernal torture.
 As those working out their evil past
 Gain a good life by their virtuous deeds,
 Here was built a temple of *Buddha*.
 A seminary for the kind-hearted,
 A kitchen and a dining-hall; and these
 Were backed by plentiful property.
 Learning of the maid's going to the King
 And how the King of unsullied fame ordered
 The transformation of the prison into
 A house of noble-hearted charity
 The prince decided to act. "Even should
 The wise criticise or the King get angry
 I shall seize that girl with lovely tresses
 When she comes out of the Assembly Hall,
 And place her on my golden chariot.
 It will then be time enough to listen
 To her learning, and old words of wisdom."
 He then went into the Assembly Hall
 Whither she had gone to feed hungry men.
 "It is twelve years since the great sage cursed
 My lady because of an evil fate

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On the bamboo-clustered banks of a river
 On the *Potiya* Hill with cloud-rich crests.
 Yet *Kayachantikai* has not come back."

Sorrowing thus, her husband *Kanchanan*
 Descended upon the ancient town
 To search for her in the Spirit Square, gardens,
 Convents, public halls and Assemblies.

30

He happened to witness the lovely girl
 Cure the sickness of hunger among all:
 "Here is a solitary vessel

In your hand. By these many are fed.

Did the gods give you this to overcome
 That terrible, elephantine hunger?"

As he praised her in terms of their past love,
 She drew away since her heart did not like that.

Going near *Udayakumaran*

She pointed out an old crone to him.

40

"Look how her hair that once gleamed as black
 sand

Has now become but a stretch of white sand.

Don't you perceive how her moon-like forehead
 Is now all grey, marked by lines of old age.

No more eye-lashes like a mighty bow.

Divided they are like dried up shrimp.

The lotus-like eyes water in sickness.

The lovely nose drips mucus constantly.

No more you see a smile with pearl-like teeth:

They are now uneven, dried up gourd seeds.

50

Whither the lips like silk-cotton flowers?

They now release the stench of rotten meat.

The ears once lovely like *vallai* stem

Have lost their flesh, and are mere dried-up skin.

No more you see the proud uprising breasts.

They hang loose and limp like bags grown empty.

Those same shoulders that were like bamboo stems

Are now bent like the coconut palmleaves.

Look at the shrivelled fingers whose skin has

Divorced blood-vessels, and their nails hang limp.

60

The thighs that once rivalled plantain stems

Are now but the dried stems of the screw-pine.

Don't you see the once desirable shins
 Now ugly with blood-vessels and bones visible?
 Watch the feet that were tender in beauty
 Now ugly like dried-up coconut seeds.
 O Prince, the ingenious ways devised
 By men to cover this fleshy form
 Are many: they do it with flowers,
 Sandal paste, clothes and jewels." Thus she spoke. 70
 "She cares not for my praise. Follows others.
 She looks at me as at a stranger. But
 To the prince with the scented garlands, she speaks
 Ancient words of wisdom, all the while
 Smiling through coral lips and pearly teeth.
 Her lily-like eyes betray love for him.
 May be he is her lover: so she has
 Elected to stay here." *Kanchanan*,
 Wielder of the bright sword, thought this wise 80
 Waxing in wrath, hid himself nearby
 Like an angry serpent within a pit.
 Though the Prince heard her wise words,
 he did not
 Give up his great desire for the damsel.
 "Manimekalai with bejewelled hands
 Has come as *Kayachantikai* with a pot
 And enmeshed my heart by her magic ways.
 If so, she would never agree to join
 At night a stranger who spoke of the past.
 I shall return at midnight to find out
 Her identity." With this thought in him, 90
 He went away sad along with Cupid,
 Who has a fish-marked flag, a sugarcane
 Bow, and arrows made of blossom buds.
 When the city slept, he started alone
 Like a tiger on an elephant kill,
 Left the palace entrance and reached the Hall
 Where the maiden was: like one entering
 A high ant-hill within which lay hidden
 A venomous snake, he stepped silently
 Into the inner apartments, while his 100
 Body exuded fine sandal paste scent.

The *Vidhyadhara* who was hidden there
 Thought: "Ah, he comes for this lady." Like an
 Incensed serpent which bares its poison teeth
 And raises its hood upwards, he got up.
 Following the Prince, he flashed out his sword
 And cut the shoulders that had garlands on.

"I will take with me *Kayachantikai*
 And fly back," he thought and went near her.

The statue on the pillar erected
 By divine inspiration, warned him thus:

"Beware! O *Vidhyadhara Kanchana*!

She is *Manimekalai* in changed garb.

Kayachantikai freed of her hunger
 Flew away to the skies. Listen to this.

Persons who travel by air never fly

Above the *Vindhya* crest, home of *Durga*.

If they do, the guardian of the *Vindhyas*,

Vindhaghatika, is angered, and she

Draws them through their shadow and eats
 them up.

Your love too has entered within her.

O *Kanchana*, you need not be distressed.

But though fate caused *Udayakumaran's*

Death, know that you have also sinned in this

Matter, O *Vidhyadhara Kanchana*!

That sin will not leave you without effect."

As the statue spoke, the *Vidhyadhara*,

Feeling in his sad heart the avenging furies,

Rose up in the sky and flew away.

110

120

Line 8. The King's endowment for the continuance of charitable works.

Line 22. This is Kanchanan speaking to himself

Line 25. The crests of the Hill were so high that they were lost in the clouds; or, the Hill had thick forests which attracted dark clouds throughout the year.

- Line 27. her : Kayachantikai.
- Line 28. ancient
town : Pukar.
- Line 31. lovely girl : Manimekalai now disguised as Kayachantikai.
- Lines 33-36. Kanchanan addresses Manimekalai mistaking her to be his beloved, Kayachantikai.
- Line 38. Manimekalai is naturally annoyed to be solicited thus by a stranger.
- Line 39 ff. Manimekalai draws closer to Udayakumaran so as to avoid Kanchanan's entreaties. At the same time she wishes to turn Udayakumaran's attention away from her lovely body as Manimekalai since she wants him to follow the True Way.
- Line 71 ff. Kanchanan thinks that Kayachantikai has rejected him in favour of the Prince as the latter was richer and more attractive.
- Line 84 ff. Udayakumaran guesses at the true identity of the maid and wishes to make sure of her real identity at night.
- Line 88. stranger : Kanchanan
- Line 91 ff. Literally, his heart smitten with love for Manimekalai.
- Line 103. this lady : Kanchanan still thinks the maid is his Kayachantikai.
- Line 111. divine
inspiration : either of the sage who caused the statue to be erected, or the sculptor had been vouchsafed divine inspiration to create such a miracle statue.

- Line 121. The message of the pillar-statue is that Kayachantikai had offended Durga of the Vindhya by flying above the mountain crest and had accordingly been punished with death.
- Line 122. i.e. Kaichana need not feel distressed that Manimekalai has been widowed, as what has happened is due to the past actions of Udayakumarani.

21. The Pillar-Statue Foretells the Future

(*Manimekalai* who has watched the goings on in the Hall now steps back into her original form and laments the end of *Udayakumaran*, recalling the past. The Pillar-statue comforts her and says that *Udayakumaran* had killed a cook in anger in his previous life as *Rahulan*. The deed has recoiled now. Fate is inexorable! The Pillar-statue also describes what is in store for *Manimekalai* in the future. This forecast prepares *Manimekalai* to face the future with equanimity. The Pillar-statue says that he is the God *Duvathigan* retained here as a divine witness).

The maiden with flower-bedecked tresses
 Who lay within the ancient temple
 To the west of the tall carved pillar
 Now rose in confusion after watching
 The *Vidhyadhara's* act and the fatal
 End of the Prince, and listening
 To what the divine statue detailed
 In terms of a wondrous message. She said:
 "No more this form." Presently released from
 The impersonation, she lamented:
 "When you died stung by the basilisk
 I burnt up my body in your pyre.
 When I could not withdraw my heart from you
 At the garden, my family deity
 Took me to *Manipallava* island.
 She showed me the saviour *Buddha's* Seat
 Where I learnt of my past. Further she told
 Me all about your earlier life.
 My love! I took *Kayachantikai's* form
 To save you by telling you of *Dharma*,
 The way of sorrow tread by evil men
 And the firm law of life, death and rebirth.
 The *Vidhyadhara's* mistaken anger
 Was used by your evil fate, perhaps!"
 She thus wept in terms of sorrowing words,
 Sighed, and struggled with great pain to get up.

10

20

To her the statue of the pillar spoke:
 "Do not approach him, maid with red-veined eyes!
 Do not approach the youth with fresh garlands.
 There have been many more births in the past 30
 When this young man had been your husband
 And you had been wife to this loving one.
 Nor do the births past exhaust existence.
 Engaged as you are in the attempt to
 Overcome the birth-cycles, do not grieve!"
 The golden maid understood the wise words.
 She asked: "Are you the deity of true voice
 Who stays in this Hall? My salutations.
 In his past birth, this young man lost his life
 Stung by the terrible fatal basilisk. 40
 Now was he felled by the *Vidhyadhara's*
 Sword, leaving my heart shocked and bereaved.
 Do you know the reasons behind all this?
 If you do, let me receive your grace!"
 "Damsel with long eyes, listen." Thus began
 That statue to speak in a divine voice.
 "On the vast *Kayankarai* river banks
 You paid respects to sage *Brahmadharman*
 Who spoke of the advent of the *Buddha*
 So as to cleanse the evil in men's hearts. 50
 'We wish to offer a feast tomorrow
 To you, O sage Such was your request.
 That evening was full of joy for you.
 In the morning the cook who came to work
 Missed his step, slipped on the floor and fell
 Along with the vessel he held which broke.
 Enraged at the missed opportunity
 To serve the pure sage who guards well *dharma*,
Rahulan swung his sword fatally ✱
 Separating the cook's shoulders and head. 60
 Ah, gentle maiden with scented tresses!
 That evil now has followed him and you.
 Persons who say 'god will save devotees
 From results of sinful actions' are fools.
 Even if due to love of righteousness
 An evil is done, fate will not be denied.

When fate does catch up, that life will suffer.
The same life, should it perform wholesome deeds
Could also attain release from all births.

It was but his evil deed in the past.

70

That came now to destroy your husband.

Hear some more, O creeper-like good maid!

The King will hear of the Prince's death

Through the holy men of this Assembly

And order you to be placed in the prison.

The queen will desire to have you with her

And so take you out of confinement.

Madhavi will salute the sage's feet

And inform him of your plight. With her

He will go to the palace. To the queen

80

He will speak *dharma*. She will release you.

Taking leave of your elders, you will

Go to *Aaputhran* who is now a king.

With him you will gather *dharma*-knowledge.

Accompanied by him sailing a ship

You will fly to pure *Manipallavam*

Visiting the island once again.

After the king of *Savaka* returns

Home, having heard *Dipatilakai* tell

His past, you will also leave the island

90

As a mendicant, and reach *Vanji* town.

There are several scholars in *Vanji*

Who can impart wisdom of the highest Truth.

'Our God is the Lord. He created

All lives and things properly,' say a few.

'Though he is formless, he creates all forms.

He indeed is the true God,' so speak others.

Yet others say: 'Our God cuts the link

Of evil birth, takes us to the crests of joy.'

'The five essences make the world,' say some

100

These varied teachings of the world religions

You would hear, O girl with scented tresses!

When one of them says: 'There is no God.

The dead do not return. Why talk of *dharma*?'

You will laugh, lovely girl, as you know well

The truth about birth and righteousness

'Do you make fun of my thoughts? You shall then
Teach me!' Then will you tell him of your past.
'That was in a magic swoon created by
The goddess who brought you. You had but
dreamt.'

110

Such would be his reaction, O good girl!
But you will not be impatient. Instead
You will clear his doubts, proving the truth
Of fate that follows, and also rebirth.
Do you know or not that statuettes
Made of faultless wood, mud and stone do not
Speak? If you do know, then listen to me.
All over this ancient great city
On the roads where chariots with flags move,
In temples, and where old trees are found,
On the banks of ancient streams, and at
Public assemblies and halls well surveyed,
For the guarding of this fortified town
Wise men have planned with care and established
Divine figures made by expert artistes
With mud, stone or wood, or painted on walls.
These same gods stay permanently in place
And speak to mortals all about their fate.
Good girl! Would you hear about my life?
I am one of the largest divine groups.
Duvathigan my name. From this pillar
Fashioned for me by *Mayan*, I stray not.
Hear about me. Even gods above
Do not know as much as mortals here.
I do not know who informed this city
That *Chitrasena* was my friend.
As if they were with us in those places
Where we had roamed together playfully
They have drawn us, and praised our greatness
And now offer fresh flowers and scented smoke.
O *Manimekalai*! I have boldly
Forecast the future. Believe in my words."
"I'll understand words divine-inspired.
But speak to me of my life upto death."
Duvathigan said: "Sure, I'll tell.

120

130

140

Good damsel, hear of what will happen.
 Ruin will seize *Kanchi* with the golden fort
 When rains fail and lives get lost. Then will you
 Take up properly the divine vessel
 In this niche of the Ancient Goddess 150
 As it is life-sustaining medicine.
 Along with your mothers, you will reach.
Kanchi, as *Aravana* is there too.
 By *Aravana's* grace, O lovely girl,
 You will be freed from other religious
 Thoughts, and gain the true way of life for you.
 Holding the vessel of *dharmic* living
 That causes rains to pour on a drought-hit earth
 You will save lives: shades of coming events
 In your life are to be witnessed there. 160
 You will then tell *Aravana* all that
 You had heard about other religions.
 He will teach you of askesis, *dharma*,
 How they interlink, and the path of Release.
 'To chase away ignorance and save living things
 There will rise the Sun of *Buddha*, spreading
Dharma, gleaming with realisations.
 Till then will I be in this place guarding
 The Truth, through several births and deaths.
 May you and your mothers live faultless. 170
 May your mind be ever filled with *dharma*.
 When he says so, you will follow his words
 Without fail. Your life will come to an end
 At *Kanchi* after you perform good deeds.
 Henceforth, your births in north *Magadha*
 Will be male, and you will lead *dharmic* lives.
 Nobly born, freed from ignorance, you will
 Gain release when you are the Chief Disciple
 Of *Buddha* who teaches the Truthful Path.
 Hear more, O maid with a shining forehead!
 Goddess *Manimekala* had once saved
 From sea a wise ancestor of yours.
 You had fed well the sage *Sadhuchakra*.
 Knowing your past births the Goddess
 Had come to the garden and brought you hence 180

To Manipallavam." Duvathigan's
 Speech helped her give up measureless sorrow.
 The good woman found the path to Release.
 Like a peacock freed from the net, she felt free
 From ignorance. The sun awoke the world.

190.

- Line 3. carved : the pillar on which the statue
 pillar of God Duvathigan had been
 carved.
- Line 5. Vidhyadhara : Kanchanan
- Line 8. she : Manimekalai
- Line 9. this form : the form of Kayachantikai
- Line 11. you : Udayakumaran
- basilisk : the mythical 'drishtivisham'
 snake which is said to kill by
 its glance.
- Line 14. The garden is the one where Manimekalai and
 Sutamati had gone to gather flowers in the third
 canto. See also cantos 4 and 5.
- family
 deity : Goddess Manimekala, the family
 deity of Kovalan.
- Lines 16-18. see cantos 8 and 9.
- Lines 19-22. see canto 20.
- Line 36. golden
 maid : Manimekalai
- Line 47 ff. See canto 9

| | | |
|----------------|-----------------------|--|
| Line 59. | Rahulan | : the name of Udayakumaran in an earlier birth. |
| Line 71. | his | : Udayakumaran's |
| Line 78. | sage | : Aravana Adikal |
| Line 83. | king | : Punyarajan, son of Bhumichandran |
| Lines 94-95. | a few | : the Brahnavadins. See canto 27, 11. 96-97. |
| Lines 96-97. | the Advaitins. | |
| Lines 98-99. | the Karmabrahmavadins | |
| Line 100. | the Bhutavadins | |
| Line 103. | one of them | : one of the Bhutavadins |
| Lines 107-108. | the Bhutavadin speaks | |
| Lines 109-110. | the Bhutavadin speaks | |
| Line 132. | Mayan | : the heavenly architect |
| Line 152. | mothers | : Madhavi and Sutamati |

22. Imprisoned

(Devotees who come to the Temple of the Wheel for early morning prayers notice the dead form of the Prince and report it to the ascetics in the temple. The ascetics learn from *Manimekalai* about what had happened and inform the King, after preparing him for the bad news by pointing out the example of his ancestor *Kagandhan* who killed his own sons for doing evil. The King orders the army chief to consign the Prince's body to the flames and imprison *Manimekalai*).

As the sun's orb chased away the night's darkness

Devotees came to the pillar-statue

Within the temple to pray: when they told

The sages of the Temple of the Wheel

About *Udayakumaran's* death, they in turn

Questioned *Manimekalai*: "Young woman!

Do you know anything regarding this?"

Without fear she told them all she knew.

The sages kept the dead Prince and the maid

In a hiding place, veiled from the public.

Then they went to the enormous palace,

And permitted by guards, approached the King.

"May your white umbrella shade the earth

From the heights, like the brilliant white moon.

Your spear and sceptre shine with grace!

Your royal wheel move without hindrance!

O King, may you live the allotted span

Of life, in terms of happiness!

Not this day alone: even in the past

This city has seen much self-destruction

By many who had drunk the wine of lust

And had approached with bad intent chaste wives,

Losing their hearts to ladies following

The spiritual life, O gracious King!

When the Virgin Goddess warned King *Kaantan*:

'Do not appear in front of the Lord

Of the Axe who decimated dynasties!'

He wondered: 'Who can guard this large city?

10

20

It will have to be *Kagandhan*, my son,
 Born to a courtesan: of whom my foes 30
 In this *Jambu* island are all afraid
 Whose insults never make him draw back.'
 He called with love: 'You have no royal right,
 Hence *Parasurama* will not maul you.
 Till I return after gaining the words
 Of *Agastya* and am freed from worry,
 Guard this city, *Kagandha*!' *Kagandhi*,
 He named the city appropriately,
 And disguising himself, went away.
 Having bathed in *Kaveri*, a brahmin, 40
 Lass, *Marudi*, was returning home alone.
 Taking her to be of easy virtue
Kagandha's son met her on *Kaveri*'s banks
 And called out: 'Come!' She was much perturbed:
 'The woman truly chaste for whom rain falls
 Is never the cause of lust in a stranger's heart.
 I have entered another's heart. What right
 Have I to tend the fire for my husband?'
 Wailing, she decided not to go home.
 Instead, she drew close to the Spirit Square. 50
 'I have not wronged the man who married me.
 Here have I become an easy catch.
 Have I not chosen married chastity?
 I do not know what evil I have done.
 O Spirit of the Square! Are you but an
 Illusive god?' To her lamenting thus
 Came the enormous Spirit and said:
 'Lady, hear. You have not understood
 The truthful poet's dictum. The chaste wife
 Bows to her spouse, and not for other gods. 60
 When she asks for rains, it always pours!
 You have placed faith in untruths and riddles,
 Loved the gay trappings of the festival
 And have even followed after strange gods.
 O lady! The rains will not obey you.
 Nor have you the power to burn the hearts
 Of strangers, like women fiercely chaste.
 If you give up these wrong ways, O lady,

The very clouds will obey your words!
 The dread noose in my hand cannot bind you 70
 As it would women of loose character.
 Nor have I the right to interfere
 Before seven days, when the King should act.
 On the seventh day from now, *Kagandhan*
 Will hear of his son's heart misled
 To you, and is sure to have him killed!
 Thus the Spirit spoke of the rule of law.
 On the same day mentioned by the Spirit
 The son was cut down by the father's sword. 80
 Hear some more! O King of kings on earth,
 Rich beyond compare, enrobed by the seas!
 There was *Dharmadatta*, and *Visakai*
 The lovely-eyed daughter of his uncle.
 They were very beautiful and appeared
 Like veritable gods drawn by divine artistes.
 Rumours flamed around that she had agreed
 To be his mistress, being related.
 Like a non-coloured drawing walking out
 The beautiful *Visakai* left her home. 90
 Entering the Assembly Hall, she cried:
 'O statue on the pillar gleaming bright!
 Relieve me of this great accusation!
 The pillar-statue praised her, crying out:
 'People of the city! She can cause rains!'
 'If I had not got the gods on my side
 This city would still believe in the wrong.
 I would be my cousin's wife in the next birth.
 This life will not see us married.' To her
 Mother she proved her virtue and herself
 Entered the nunnery. *Dharmadatta* 100
 And his parents left *Pukar* city.
 They praised in several ways the statue
 On the pillar: 'You saved us indeed
 From sorrows that sought to drown all of us.'
 They later reached southern *Maturai*,
 A prosperous city with good people.
Dharmadatta vowed to himself: 'I shan't
 Marry any girl except *Visakai*,

My uncle's daughter with lovely tresses.
 Let this life be spent thus! Concentrating 110
 On his trade, he earned enormous wealth.
 As a rich man, he received the award
 Of golden *etti* flower from the King.
 Wealthy, he attained the age of sixty.
 Once a brahmin spoke to him: 'What have you
 Achieved here, rich man beyond compare?
 Despite *dharmic* acts, a person sans wife
 Cannot enter paradise: have you not
 Heard of this saying? If you have, do not
 Tarry here. Return to your town. 120
 Therefore the merchant returned to this place
 Leaving South *Maturai* impoverished.
 Having heard of his return, the golden
Visakai went to him from her convent.
 The good woman, without being shy, went
 In public to him who had eschewed wrong.
 'We cannot recognise each other now.
 Where is gone the beauty that made us love?
 You are sixty years old. My tresses
 Exuding scent, are now speckled with grey. 130
 Where have youth and desire gone? O cousin
 Whose mind is confounded! Tell me of that!
 I shall not join you in this birth.
 In my next, I shall serve you as wife.
 Youth is fleeting: this body is mortal.
 All the gathered wealth is impermanent.
 Sons cannot assure us a place in heaven.
Dharma alone is a help for all time.
 Perform charity!' *Dharmadatta*
 Showed his enormous wealth to his cousin. 140
 Helped by her he did many charities
 Outnumbering the stars on the high skies.
 As the wise spinster whose character
 Had been cleared by the pillar-statue
 Walked in public on the flags-waving road
 The evil elder brother of the man
 Who had been killed because of *Marudi*,
 Lust-blind, wished to pull out the fresh garland

That was hanging from his dark, curly hair
 So that he could place the string of flowers
 On her and tell: 'this is the marriage
 In secret praised by the poets of old!' 150
 But the hand that tried to seize the garland
 Could not be released from the black hair.
 When *Kagandhan* heard: 'because of the maid
 The hand cannot come down,' his anger blazed.
 He cared not for his son's discomfiture.
 He cut down and killed his son with a sword.
 Our gracious King! May you guard the earth
 Through ages after ages." 160
 Thus one of the sages spoke to him.
 The King of pure and endless fame then asked:
 "O wise sages! You spoke words of wisdom
 Prefaced with a 'not this day alone.'
 Do such happenings take place even now?"
 When the King with the victory-spear asked so
 One amongst the sages began to speak.
 "May your royal sceptre be blameless!
 Five are the evils condemned by wise men
 On this earth. Of these, wine, untruth, stealing 170
 And murder are always found along with
 Lust. Only those who have given it up
 May be said to have been freed from all evil.
 Hence have all the great sages eschewed it.
 O King of this vast earth! Those who cannot
 Aren't they thrown into the flames of hell?
Madhavi of lovely eyes, the daughter
 Of *Chitrapati*, shocked by her lover's death
 Entered the refuge of *Buddhist* sages.
 Her gentle daughter, *Manimekalai*, 180
 With child-like breasts and speech, a child's prattle
 Chose asceticism, begged from houses
 Big and small, and reached the Assembly Hall.
 Though her nature continued to be such
 He followed her throughout as a shadow.
 As he was filled with desire for the maid
 He entered the Hall at dark, unafraid;
 The maiden took *Kayachantikai*'s form.

As *Kayachantikai* is also there,
Kayachantikai's spouse, a sword-wielding 190
Vidhyadhara appeared: this young man
 Has come for her, he thought, impelled by fate.
 O King with an umbrella that is moon-white!
 As your son, *Udayakumaran*
 Would not leave, fate got her on to the Hall,
 And brought him also to the Assembly
 At midnight, and invited the sword-wielding
Vidhyadhara, *Kayachantikai's* mate.
 It confounded the *Vidhyadhara's* heart:
 'This man has come for my *Vidhyadhara* lady.' 200
 Further, fate went onwards to cut down
 The Prince inside the Assembly Hall
 Through the sword in the *Vidhyadhara's* hand."
 Such was the news related by the sage
 Looking on the face of the Army Chief
 The King with the beautiful high crown said:
 "The *Vidhyadhara* has done a wrong thing
 As he presumed to usurp my action.
 If the guardian is slack, there can be 210
 No askesis, nor female chastity.
 Before other kings come to know that
 Such an evil son was born in this house
 Which had once punished a Prince to guard
 the Law,
 Put the young man on the funeral pyre
 And place the courtesan's girl under guard."

Line 3. they : devotees who had come at
 dawn.

Line 5. they : the ascetics who lived in the
 Temple.

Lines 19-20. The King need not feel self-reproachful as the
 cause for the first misdeed in the city.

- Line 25. Virgin Goddess : Sambapathi
- Lines 26-27. Lord : Parasurama. Sage Parasurama, son of Jamadagni and wielder of the battle-axe, had taken a vow to destroy all the kshatriya kings as one of them had killed Jamadagni.
- Line 30. of whom : Of Kagandhan
- Line 32. Kagandhan can retaliate swiftly
- Line 36. Agastya : a sage
- Lines 45-46. An echo of a Kural couplet, indited by Tiruvalluvar.
- Line 59. truthful poet : Tiruvalluvar
- Lines 59-60. A quotation from the Kural which attributes super-human powers to chaste ladies.
- Lines 72-73. If the King does not take action in seven days, the Spirit would step in.
- Line 88. non-coloured drawing : a line drawing, not yet shaded with colours.
- Line 113. the golden etti flower : the highest trade award.
- Line 146. Another son of Kagandhan
- Line 151. her : Visakai
- Line 185. he : Udayakumaran
- Line 191. this young man : Udayakumaran

Line 195. her : Manimekalai

Lines 212-213. Manu Needi Chola, an ancestor of the present King Mavankilli, had his son killed by a chariot-wheel, as the Prince's chariot-wheel had caused the death of a calf.

23. Released

(King *Mavankilli* sends wise *Vasantavai* to console the Queen. The Queen listens to her and dissembles her anger. She then takes *Manimekalai* to her residence and poisons her without success. She then sends a rogue to deflower the maid but *Manimekalai* takes on the form of a man which frightens away the intruder. The Queen denies her food, but the maid is able to overcome the pangs of hunger thanks to the chant taught by Goddess *Manimekala*. The Queen realises her folly and the maid tells her how mental delusion leads to evil results and speaks of the need to gain freedom from Ignorance. The Queen attains peace of mind at last).

Vasantavai, an old grey-haired lady
 Could chase away sorrows that come upon
 Kings, Princes, and Queens with rights to the earth
 That grants prosperity, by means of words
 Dipped in wisdom, of all that she had learnt.
 And by explaining thoughtful messages.
 Sent by the King, she speeded to the Queen
 To console her. But she desisted from
 Loud lamentations. She stood before the mistress
 And saluted, spoke words of blessing.

10

"Death in war or when guarding one's people
 Or when seizing the land of enemies
 Or when placed on *darbha* grass and cut up
 By sword with the chant, 'attain the way
 Of the war-victor!': that is noble. My tongue
 Is ashamed to praise royal deaths by old age!
 How will your son's death be understood?
 For guarding his King or defeating another?
 Do not give expression to your grief
 In front of the guardian-King!" She went.
 The Queen hid her sorrowful heart within.
 Dissembling her grief, seemingly normal
 She vowed: "I shall bring *Manimekalai*
 To grief!" One day she said to the King:

20

"Our Prince was unworthy of power
As he loved a nun whom others leave alone.
The maid was granted wisdom that rejects
Rare youth, rendering completely useless
Even Cupid with the sugarcane bow.
The prison is not a fit place for her." 30
They who are upright are the king's children.
"Those who are not, are best forgotten,"
He replied. "If you have realised this,
You can free the maiden from the prison."
"The young girl can stay with me if she wants.
Or else she can go out with her vessel.
None shall prevent her." Then the Queen took the girl
And went to her palace. "I shall confound
Her brain with madness so that this city's
People will throw stones at her." She poisoned 40
The maid who having known all her other births
Remained with an unconfused, clear brain.
The Queen tempted an illiterate brute
With money: "Go to *Manimekalai*,
Forcing yourself upon her, make marks
On her lovely youthful breasts and proclaim
That she has joined you in the love-act.
Go speak of this to all whom you may meet."
He went immediately to the place
That was lonely and where the maid was. 50
The girl recognised in this the evil
Hand of the Queen, and recited the chant
To take the appearance of a man.
Terrified by the looks of the stranger,
The black-mailer thought: "No man comes to the
Royal women's wing. I cannot fathom
What the hellish Queen wants." So he ran away.
"Shall I see her live, who caused my son's death?"
The Queen put the maiden in a stuffy dungeon.
"The maid is sick, she does not therefore eat food." 60
The chant to overcome hunger rescued
The lovely maid and kept her body strong.
Shocked and helplessly crying the Queen prayed:
"Unable to withstand my son's sad end

I have tortured you, O ascetic girl!
 Lady like the wealth-goddess! 'Forgive me!"
 "On the day when the fiery-eyed serpent
 Killed *Rahulan* born to *Neelapathi*
 And I entered the pyre as I was then
 Unable to live on alone without him, 70
 From which place did you lament for the Prince?
 O gentle woman! You have done wrong.
 Did you cry for the body? or for life?
 If it was for the body, who were they
 Who burnt him at the crematorium?
 If it was for the life, you cannot know
 Where it is reborn according to its past deeds.
 If you have loved the life, then must you love
 Every living thing, O gracious lady!
 Besides, O great Queen, hear what the thief 80
 Who killed your son did. As *Rahula*
 Had cut down the cook who had slipped and smashed
 The serving vessels, fate drank up his life
 In the form of a poison-spewing snake
 And killed him with the *Vidhyadhara's* sword.
 You may ask: "How did you know all this past?
 Here is my answer." Then the maiden
 Told her all that had happened to her since
 She entered the flower-garden upto
 The time when she heard the statue speak. 90
Manimekalai spoke further: "You did
 Poison me: but as I know of rebirth
 I remained with a pure, unclouded mind.
 When the illiterate brute came at night
 I had taken a male form, O Queen!
 Was it not due to the chant that kills hunger
 That I escaped your evil designs?
 But I have no desire to fly away
 Nor impersonate. You had given birth
 To my husband in the birth past. Therefore 100
 I stayed to relieve you of the bleak past,
 Help you to reject evil, eschew ignorance
 That causes mental illusion. Hear me!
 In a land confused by tyrannous rule

A housewife was deserted by her spouse.
 Separated from her son, she journeyed
 Far, where she lived as a public woman.
 The boy was rescued by a good brahmin
 Who brought him up without the mother's knowledge
 The son did not know her as his mother, 110
 Lived with her, and died when he learnt the truth.
 A pregnant doe wandered in the forests
 For water to quench its thirst. A hunter's
 Fatal arrow pierced through its stomach.
 He ran to it as it fell crying out
 And was overcome by its shedding tears
 From lovely red eyes, breathing hard throughout.
 The sender of the arrow killed himself.
 Have you heard of that, O lovely-eyed Queen!
 Drunkards are gored to death by the white tusks 120
 Of elephants in rut, as they insist
 To walk in front of the dread animals.
 Is it not due to the frenzy of drink?
 Has anyone leading a life of lies
 Crossed the deep ocean of endless sorrow?
 As for those who use the plough of stealing,
 They but attain misery. These evils
 Give only sorrow to human beings.
 We must eschew them. Mere scholarship
 Is not enough, O Lady! Only those 130
 Who give up anger have attained knowledge.
 Only those who help people in distress
 May be said to be truly living on this earth.
 They alone know the pathway to release
 Who feed people suffering from hunger.
 The wise who have known the ultimate truth
 Shower their love on all living creatures.
 As she sprinkled the waters of knowledge
 Pouring the nectar into the good Queen's ears,
 She put out the inner fire that had burnt 140
 The wood of mind by the flame of the son's loss.
 As water treated with clearing-nut,
 The queen's mind became crystalline: she saluted
 The maid who, however, did not accept it.

"This is not right, you gave birth to my husband.
Also, you are the consort of the King."
The maid in turn, saluted her and stood.

- Line 13. The reference is to an ancient custom of placing the body of kings who had died of old age on a bed of grass and cutting the body into two by a sword with a prayer that he may attain the same *veera-swarga* (the Heavens of the Heroes) attained by those who fall in the battlefield.
- Line 52. the chant : the chant taught by Goddess Manimekala that would help the girl assume the form she wanted. See Canto 10.
- Line 57. The black-mailer began to suspect the Queen's fidelity.
- Line 71. Where was the Queen in that earlier birth to lament Rahulan's death, that she should weep for his end now?
- Lines 74-75. The servants were actually carrying out the orders of the royal parents to cremate the son's body. Why did she not prevent it, if she thought the body was immortal?
- Line 98 ff. Even as she had used two of the chants to save herself by changing her form and keeping herself from hunger, Manimekalai could have made use of the third chant that enables her to fly in the air. But she chose to remain a willing prisoner of the Queen as she desired to remove the veil of Ignorance that had been deluding the elder woman's mind.

24. Towards Aaputhran's Kingdom

(*Chitrapati* comes to the Queen to take back her grand-daughter *Manimekalai* and tells her about the King's union with the unknown *Naga* Princess, *Peelivalai* and how their son is being brought up in a distant island. *Chitrapati*'s artful words do not disturb the Queen and she refuses to part with the maid. Sage *Aravana*, *Madhavi* and *Sutamati* now come to the Queen. The Sage imparts them spiritual counsel. *Manimekalai* seeks the Queen's permission to move to other places for engaging herself in charitable works. She then flies in the air and reaches *Nagapuram*, the country ruled over by *Punyarajan*.)

The old courtesan who had made the Prince
 Desire the maid, heard with shock that he
 Who had followed her plan had been destroyed
 By the *Vidhyadhara*'s sword. Sorrowing,
 She went to get *Madhavi*'s daughter freed,
 Fell at the Queen's feet and spoke in detail.
 "The eleven damsels given to *Indra*
 By ladies possessing snake-like graces:
 The five who were caused to be born on earth
 When their dance before *Indra* was found wrong;
 The hundred and four women with his son
 Cursed by the sage: also one belonging
 To my tribe, *Urvasi* who had been cursed
 In the court of *Indra*, with shining crown.
 None of these one hundred and twenty-one
 Ladies had cause to suffer as grievously
 As me, since the founding of this city.
 O gracious Queen! I have been hurt the most.
Madhavi's going to a nunnery
 When she heard that her keeper had died:
 The danseuse with a begging bowl in hand
 Went to all homes and received charity.
 Women of the dancing community
 Laugh, and do not accept such goings on.
 It is not only the Prince, but this town

10

20

Is also in danger due to the maid!
 In the cork-tree forests on the beach
 With high sand-dunes and close to salt-beds,
 Where Killi with the gleaming crown walked
 Mid a flower-garden spreading the pride 30
 Of the spring-season, appeared a girl,
 All by herself, on one side of the place.
 'Who is this that comes?' the King wondered.
 Helplessly, he fell in a swoon of love.
 Struck by the arrow of Cupid which has
 The seasonals, jasmine, lotus, mango,
 Lily and Asoka blossoms that work through
 The eyes, the ears, the lips, the nose,
 And the body enjoyed by embraces, 40
 He who had defeated many in wars
 Now became her slave. A month passed by.
 She did not declare herself. In the end
 That maid like a flower-creeper, vanished.
 The scourge of enemies now went searching
 For her: 'Ah! Whither has she hid herself?'
 A *charana* who can go below earth,
 Rise in the skies and walk on water, appeared.
 The King saluted him and requested:
 'My beloved has hid herself here.
 Have you seen her, O sage? Kindly tell me.' 50
 To the King he replied: 'I have not seen.
 But I have known that young lady before.
 King, listen. *Valaivanan* with the spear
 Of victory, who rules the *Naga* land
 With kindness, had a daughter born
 To his Queen, *Vasamayilai*: the day
 Day when *Peelivalai* was born, the royal
 Astrologer said: 'She will be with child
 By a King belonging to the solar race.'
 That son will come to you. But the maiden 60
 Will not. Do not grieve. Remember Goddess
Manimekala's words that this city
 Will be completely engulfed by the sea
 If the festival of *Indra* is not
 Performed. *Indra's* curse cannot be repealed.

O scourge of the foes! Remember as sure
 The end of the city and the royalty.
 Never forget to celebrate *Indra's*
 Festival, lest the sea eat up *Pukar!*"
 Since the day the sage parted with these words 70
 The citizens have not been free of dread.
 O Queen! I am worried that if the maid
 Who carries that name is put to trouble
 The Goddess may return to wreak vengeance!
 Give back to my house the danseuse whose mind
 Has changed." The King's consort then spoke to her
 "The wise have rejected as sin untruth,
 Wine, lust, murder and the desire to steal.
 Your way of life based on these five paths
 Has been given up by the maid, know this. 80
 She will not come with you to your house.
 Henceforth she will stay with me." Thus the Queen.
Madhavi heard of *Manimekalai's*
 State; her heart was confused as the waters
 Of a lake struck by dust. She then spoke to
Sutamati, shook like a wind-swept creeper,
 Bowed at *Araṇa's* feet, and with him
 Came to the Queen. On the sage's approach
 The Queen, her serving maids, *Chitrapati*
 And *Madhavi's* daughter received him, 90
 Saluting at the feet of the great sage
 With their bejewelled hands. He blessed them:
 'May you gain knowledge!' Then the gracious Queen
 With her jewelled hands showed the ascetic
 A proper seat, washed his feet with water
 And did the honours. "My good fortune
 Has brought you here, grieving your feet
 That has seen many decades. Your voice
 Remains fresh though the body has grown old
 And tired. May you live for long!" She praised. 100
 "Lady, hear me. Though I have followed
 An ascetic's life, I am now like the
 Setting sun. Birth, ageing, sickness, death.
 This is a natural law. Hear this.
 The twelve conditions of existence are:

Ignorance, action, consciousness, subtle form,
 The senses, feeling, experience, desire,
 Attachment, life, appearance and fate.
 They who know this, gain realisation.
 Else, they only know the dark depths of hell. 110
 'What is ignorance?' It is not knowing
 These mentioned above, and getting confused
 About the nature of what is seen
 And even accept that a hare has horns.
 The world of living among the three worlds
 Has countless species. The six-fold life has
 Humans, gods, *Brahmas*, denizens of Hell,
 Animal species and the spirit worlds.
 Lives, according to their good or bad fate
 Are born in one of these forms and work out 120
 Their fate: accordingly, lives gain happiness
 Or suffer pain as the case may be.
 'What is evil fate?' If this question comes,
 O good woman, hear about it all.
 Within the untrembling body there come
 The desire to kill, to steal and to lust.
 Four evils grow from untruth, backbiting,
 Harsh words and purposeless speech: from the heart
 Rise up greed, anger and illusory
 Feelings. People with discrimination 130
 Know these ten evils and avoid the same.
 If they follow the evils, they take birth
 As animals, spirits, or hell's minions
 And find themselves in pain and confusion.
 'What is a good birth?' To such a question:
 By avoiding the ten evils above,
 And holding to discipline and charity
 They are born among the three best: godheads,
 Humans and *Brahmas*: and living as such
 They reap the results as an endless bliss. 140
 O bejewelled ladies with our Queen!
 Listen only to faultless good *dharma*.
Manimekalai who knows about rebirth,
 After you have learnt of other doctrines
 I shall teach you in detail about this

And its many divisions. O maiden
 With pearly teeth!" Saying this he got up.
 The maiden rose and saluted the sage.
 "O Queen, waiting maid: and *Chitrapati*!
 Be saved by cogitating on the sage's words. 150
 If I stay in this city any more
 People will say: she caused the Prince's end.
 After going to *Aaputhran's* country
 I shall pray at pure *Manipallavam*.
 Go to *Vanji* and the Chaste Lady
 And perform good deeds everywhere.
 Do not worry about my safety.
 My dear ones!" She saluted them all.
 In the evening when the sun vanished
 Like molten gold, the maiden saluted 160
 The Assembly Hall, the temple of the Goddess,
 The bright pillar, and went right-wards.
 She then flew high in the air and came down
 In a garden of the city ruled by
Indra's nephew; she rested there awhile.
 Saluting a sage who was there, she asked:
 "What is this city's name? Who is the King
 Who rules over it?" The good sage replied.
 "This is *Nagapuram*. It is ruled by
Punyarajan, son of *Bhumichandran*. 170
 Since the day he was born in this city
 The rains from high skies have never failed us.
 The land and the trees give generously.
 No life here has the hunger-sickness."
 Thus the sage in the flower-filled garden
 Spoke about the King with lovely garlands.

Line 1. old courtesan : Chitrapati

Line 8. The damsels were so supple in their movements.

Line 11. his son : *Indra's* son, *Jayanthan*

- Line 20. her keeper : Kovalan
- Line 21. danseuse : Manimekalai
- Line 26. Chitrapati recounts the story of a forecast which had said that King Mavankilli would give up the performance of the Indra Festival resulting in the destruction of Kaveri-p-poompattinam.
- Line 44. scourge of enemies : King Mavankilli
- Line 46. charana : a Buddhist sage who has attained supra-normal powers.
- Line 73. that name : the name of Goddess Manimekalai.
- Line 105. The twelve conditions of existence are usually termed in Buddhist theology as ignorance, action, consciousness, name-form, sense-organs, sensuous feelings, experience, thirst, attachment, existence, birth, and disease.
- Line 155. chaste lady : Kannaki. This refers to the statue of Kannaki erected in Vanji.
- Line 165. Indra's nephew : i.e. of Indra's line. Here Punyarajan.

25. With Aaputhran to Manipallavam

(King *Punyarajan* who happens to come to the royal garden, sees *Manimekalai* and enquires about her. *Manimekalai* herself asks *Punyarajan* to come to *Manipallavam* and she reaches the island first by flying in the air. The Seat of *Buddha* reveals Sage *Brahmadharma* and the maid recalls his words of spiritual teaching in the earlier birth. In the meantime *Punyarajan* learns from the Queen Mother all about his strange birth and desires to renounce the kingdom. The minister *Janamithran* pacifies him and assures him that his presence is a must for the prosperity of the country. The King goes to *Manipallavam* for a brief visit. He learns of his past from the Seat of *Buddha*. He gains peace of mind. Goddess *Dipatilakai* shows them the bleached bones of *Aaputhran* and his compatriots in a corner of the beach. She also gives *Manimekalai* the dire news of *Pukar's* ruin by the sea. As advised by the Goddess, *Manimekalai* goes to *Vanji*. *Punyarajan* returns to his kingdom).

The King entered the garden with his Queen
 And bowed at the feet of the Buddhist sage.
 From him he heard of *dharma*, sin, of things
 Mortal, the reason thereof, sorrow, how
 The lives reach new places, the twelve causes,
 The path to Release and of *Buddha's* peace.
 "Who is this lovely girl with no equal
 Whose eyes do not move in tune with desire,
 Who listens to *dharma* here with a
 Vessel in her hand?" The King asked. To him
 Saluted and replied an official:
 "Our *Jambu* continent has none to equal
 This maid: when I had gone with ships
 To the good city close to *Kaveri*
 Seeking the friendship of King *Killi*,
 The sage *Aravana* spoke of her life
 And I had repeated this to you then.
 O King with honey-dripping garlands!

This is she; she has left that lovely town
 And come here." Listening to all this 20
 The maid spoke: "The vessel in your hand
 Has now reached me: sunk in riches you are
 Ignorant. Not that past nor the present
 Life as a cow-born do you know of. What have you
 done?
 You will not learn of the nature of birth
 That brings attachment unless you go to
Manipallavam: hence, come there, O King!"
 Having said this to the King, the maiden
 Rose in the spotless sky. Before the sun
 Sank in the West, she came down to the earth, 30
 And then walked around *Manipallavam*'s
 Wave-girt beaches scented all over with
 Fresh blossoms. Coming upon the holy
 Seat of *Buddha* who destroys attachments
 She saluted. The jewelled Seat began
 To vision clearly her entire past.
 Looking upon the just sage on the banks
 Of the river *Kayankarai*, she bowed.
 "To those who came with King *Athipathi*
 Eager to hear of *dharma*, you spoke 40
 With your tongue as stick and mouth as drum:
 'Give up evil deeds that lead to birth as
 Animals, hell's denizens and spirits:
 By this, you become gods, men and *Brahma*.
 Then you perform good deeds without stopping.
 One shall be born who knows all about Truth
 By his All-Knowledge, to save the whole world.
 Except those who hearken to his *dharma*
 The rest cannot escape sorrowing birth.
 Take to *dharma* ere inescapable 50
 Death gathers you up!' Hearing those words
 We saluted you. Then did you tell us
 Words of dire import. And so I asked you.
 'Why did *Indra* place this illustrious
 Seat before *Buddha* incarnated? And
 Why does this great Seat tell me all about
 My births past?' 'This pure Seat will not accept

Any one except all-knowing *Buddha*.
 Till this Seat accepts, the lord of the gods
 Will not salute *Buddha*. The same *Indra* 60
 Built this Seat for the Great One and proclaimed:
 'Let this Seat of *Dharma* speak to mortals
 About their births past.' Therefore will the Seat
 Clearly show the past births of the maid!
 Such your message that day! In that wise
 The sage's words are coming true today."
 Speaking in this manner, she praised the Seat
 And remained praying. The King there returned
 From the garden to the city. And then
 Through his mother *Amarasundari* 70
 He heard of his father, a sage, mother
 A cow, and how by the great sage's grace
 He was born in a golden egg unbound
 By umbilical cord, and how by that
 Sage's love the childless *Bhumichandra*
 Took him and brought him up. Hearing this
 The King was exceedingly sorrowful.
 He thought of his mother's deed in the past
 And the manner in which he got the present birth.
 "With kings waiting to gain my audience 80
 For redress, me patronising scholars,
 Watching dramas, listening to music
 Sweetly tuned, enjoying the mock anger
 Of my queens, bowing at their feet circled
 By anklets, drawing *kumkum* marks on their breasts,
 Decorating their dark ringlet tresses
 With my own hands, quaffing the sweet honey
 Springing from in between their lovely teeth,
 Losing myself in the proud heady wine
 Of love-play as Cupid let fly his darts 90
 Reddening the dark eyes on moon-like faces.
 Such my life. Better to renounce all this."
 As the King of the renowned royalty
 Spoke thus saying, "the seed sowed by the sage
 In my ears sprouted faultlessly
 Today because of *Manimekalai*,"
 Minister *Janamithran* recognised

The King's change of heart. So he bowed and said:

"Hail, or lord! Please listen to my words.

Prior to your father gaining you,

This country with cities, for twelve years

Had no rains, causing widespread loss of life.

The mother had no pity for her child

And ate all by herself the food she got.

As rain-bearing clouds in the hot summer

You appeared, King with flower-garlands!

After your appearance, the rains

Did never fail. The earth was generous.

Living beings knew not hunger's torture.

When you go away, your whole country

Will weep like a child that lost its mother.

If you do not guard the earth from sorrow

And seek the supreme life of salvation,

You would have got what you wanted only

By the death of living beings in this land, O King!

This is not the *dharma* preached by *Buddha*,

Who cares not for himself, but looks after

All other lives. How come you think what is

Against your intelligence?" The King

Listened to wisdom and said: "My desire

To see *Manipallavam* will not slake.

Yours the duty to guard for a month

This kingdom, my women and citizens!"

Calling upon ship-makers, he reached the beach

Drummed by ocean waves, and embarked a ship.

Not tarrying in any place, the ship

Went straight to *Manipallavam* island.

The maiden with faultless knowledge came there,

Recognised the King's ship and was happy.

With the King she went around the island

That had flowering gardens swept by waves.

"Noble lord! Look. This is the *Dharma* Seat

That visions past births," she pointed out.

The King went around and prayed. To the King

The jewelled Seat showed his past births just as

A spotless mirror held in hand reflects

The face of the onlooker. "I know my

100

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130

Past birth. I am relieved of my sorrows.
 O Goddess of Knowledge in southern *Maturai*
 In Tamil land! There came to me, a beggar, 140
 Some hungry people on a rainy night
 During the darkness. In that public hall
 I grew sad, unable to offer them food.
 'Even if the country should be stricken by drought
 This vessel will not grow empty. Pine not!
 Take this!' So saying you gave the nectar pot
 And cut the bonds of my birth, O Goddess!
 Appearing in our consciousness
 You teach the Truth'. O glowing Goddess, hail!
 The noble feet that cleanses the evil 150
 Tongue, be it of gods or *Brahmas*, I praise
 In all my births, nor shall I ever forget,
 O Mother!" Thus he prayed. Then along with
Manimekalai he went south-west wards
 And reached the wave-kissed banks of *Gomukhi*
 Lake. They rested beneath a *Pinnai* tree,
 Giving shade. The guardian deity
 Of the island was pleased to see the maid
 Along with *Aaputhran*. She drew near.
 "O noble man who dispelled hunger 160
 With the food in your hand! You have come.
 Those who had left you then came back
 Later. Learning of your fate they too
 Gave up their lives. Look on the bones of those
 Nine merchants! Those bones again belong to
 Their companions who shared their board
 And later died of sorrow. As the sand
 Gathered by waves grown into tall dunes for covering,
 Under the cool shades of blooming *Pinnai*
 The bones of others who gave their lives 170
 Lovingly to the King lie. Look. You did kill
 Yourself; you caused the death of others
 Who came pitying your condition.
 Are you not a killer? You are a King!
 O jewel among women who carries
 The vessel praised by many! Your town
 Has entered the sea. Listen to the cause.

- Peelivalai*, daughter of the *Naga* King,
 Best among womenkind, came here with
 Her son born to the solar dynasty. 180
 As she went around the island, praying
 To the great Seat established by *Indra*,
 A *Kambala* merchant's ship drew anchor.
 She went to him and learnt of his motherland.
 'Please hand over this child to your king!'
 She requested him. The merchant received
 The boy with immeasurable pleasure,
 Saluted the noble prince, and later
 Left the port. The same night when he started
 On the journey, the ship was wrecked on the 190
 Shores of the ocean. Those who did escape
 Went to King *Killi* with the shining lance,
 And told him about the loss of his son.
 The King was inconsolable by the son's loss.
 Like a snake that had lost its jewel
 He searched all over mountains and sea-shores.
 The city forgot *Indra's* festival.
 Goddess *Manimekala* was angered.
 She cursed: 'Let the beautiful sea be
 Destroyed by the sea!' *Pukar* was ruined. 200
 As the sea flowed over the large city
 Like *Indra* with long lance-wielding hands,
 The King departed from thence all alone.
 Uprising waves engulfed noble *Pukar*.
 Your mothers along with the great sage
 Entered *Vanji* without any trouble.
 The guardian of the sea praised by many
 Told me this. If you wish to hear more
 Of how Goddess *Manimekala* saved
 Your ancestor who then performed there 210
 The best of *dharmas*, go to *Aravana*
 At *Vanji*, O maid with knowledge!" And then
 The Goddess of the island flew away.
 Saddened, the King with *Manimekalai*
 Dug up the thick sand dunes. There lay exposed
 The bones of his earlier cultured birth

- Line 37. just sage : Brahmadharmā
- Line 41. i.e. with authority
- Line 53. words of dire import : the prediction that Athipathi's capital will be destroyed within a few days.
- Line 59. lord of the gods : Indra
- Line 68. The King there : Punyarajan in Nagapuram
- Line 71. sage : Manmugan
- Line 78. mother's deed in the past : Sali's adultery
- Line 79. manner : being hatched from an egg.
- Line 80 ff. Punyarajan gives way to self-pity.
- Line 94. the sage : Dharmasavaka
- Line 98. change of heart : the king's desire to renounce secular life and embrace spiritual life.
- Lines 103-104. Indicates the acuteness of the drought.
- Line 112 ff. Janamithran speaks of the Bodhisattva ideal which rejects personal salvation when the rest of the world remains to be saved.
- Line 128. the maid : Manimekalai
- Lines 139-140. Goddess of Knowledge : Chinta Devi

- Line 157. guardian deity : Dipatilakai
- Lines 162-164. The fellow-merchants died because of remorse, having caused Asputhran's death unwittingly.
- Line 166. companions : friends and servants fed by the Nine merchants.
- Line 176. your town : Kaveri-p-poompattinam
- Line 177. entered the sea has been overrun by the sea.
- Line 180. solar dynasty : the Chola dynasty
- Line 184. motherland : The Chola country
- Line 194. Killi had but recently lost his elder son, Udayakumaran.
- Line 203. the King : Mavankilli
- Line 207. guardian of the sea : Goddess Manimekala
- Line 209. your ancestor : An ancestor of Kovalan was saved by the Goddess; Kovalan named his daughter after the Goddess to express his gratitude.
- Line 221. Manimekalai consoles the King and frees him from the shock of recognising his part.
- Line 234. Literally it is a new birth for the King, as he is now going to lead a life of charitable works.
- Line 236. Manimekalai gently reminds Punyarajan that the parting of ways has come for this birth.

26. Entering the City of Vanji

(*Manimekalai* reaches *Vanji* and worships the images of *Kovalan* and *Kannaki*. *Kannaki* appears before her and tells her about the past life of *Kovalan* and what the future is going to be. *Manimekalai* then put on the form of an ascetic and enters the city of *Vanji*).

The maid traversed the skies to the city,
Eager to see her mother, *Kannaki*
Of immense love, and father *Kovalan*
The charitable, who were now sculpted
As statues invested with divinity.

"Not seeking the duty of love, nor of
Renunciation, you took to the path
Of stern chastity for life's fulfilment.
Tell me why," she cried, praying in front
Of their images. The great chaste Goddess said:

10

"When *Maturai* was burnt by my anger
Due to the evil that had struck my lord,
Goddess *Maturapathi* appeared.

'This has been due to your evil past.
Vasu and *Kumaran* were agnate kings
Of *Kalinga* country with great gardens.
Simhapura and *Kapila* were their
Capitals: they battled amongst themselves.

Between the cities a stretch of sixty
Miles lay deserted, unapproached by man.

20

Eager to make money *Sangaman* brought
Jewels secretly, and with his wife went
To *Simhapura*. He was detected

And reported upon. Your husband
Bharathan, a cruel official of the King,
Caught him, and accusing him as a spy
To the King, had the innocent man
Condemned to death. There his wife lamented
Pitifully and went to a hill-top

Getting ready to die. Her curses then
Have now borne result. The evil of past
Will inexorably chase the doer.'

30

Even after she had told me this truth
 I destroyed this city by my anger!
 Our good past has led us to heavens.
 At the close of that, the result of this
 Evil act will certainly follow us.
 When there is no more refuge in heavens
 Several births on earth and suffering
 Good and bad effects: like you, we shall swim
 In the sea of life, struggling with birth and death.
 In *Magadha* where the rains never fail
 Is a town hailed by elders as its *tilak*,
Kapilavastu famed for its beauty.
 Here the noble Sun of *Buddha* shall rise
 Brimming with the ten strengths that lead beyond,
 And sitting under the *Bodhi* tree teach
 The faultless noble four-fold truths
 And the twelve conditions of existence,
 Teaching us the way to destroy them all
 And then gain release from the three evils.
 Thus will the Lord spread the rays of *dharma*
 All over the vast spaces of the world.
 Maid! As I had prayed with your father
 At the seven *Indra*-seats of *Buddha*,
 We will escape rebirth in lower forms
 And listen to his words with loving hearts.
 Our mind led to asceticism,
 We will reach the state of beyonding birth.
 But even then, for a long time to come
 We will help all people to gain release.
 O maid with scented tresses! You too shall
 Go into this ancient city
 And hear the way of different creeds.
 After you recognise their falsity
 You shall follow *Buddha's Pithaka* Way.
 These will now happen," explained the mother.
 "Taking you to be immature, no one
 Will teach you the creeds. Don another form!"
 The maid took the form of an ascetic
 Thanks to the chant given by the Goddess.
 She then reached a place close to the fort wall

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Filled by temples, stages, hermitages,
 Flowering gardens and lakes where there were
 Holy sages, realised souls, and scholars
 Of ancient books showing the good path.
 The upright King *Senguttuvan* at his
Vanji city, with his battle heroes
 Wearing *Vanji* flowers on their hair-knots,
 Making all countries he traversed look like
 Mountain land due to the large elephants.
 Chariots, horses and brave infantry
 Went like the loud sea in the rainy season
 Resting on the banks of the great Ganges.
 They crossed to the north bank by means of ships
 Defeated *Kanaka*, *Vijaya* and
 Other kings, placed a Himalayan stone
 Of holiness on their golden crowns while
 The *Chera* decorated his tresses
 With golden *sirissa* for victory.
 As the time had come for her to reap good
 And make clear the noble four-fold truths
 The maid reached the golden city named
 To spread the fame of the brave, heroic King.

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| | | |
|----------|-----------------------------|---|
| Line 1. | the maid | : Manimekalai |
| Line 6. | duty of love | : dying along with the beloved as sati. |
| Line 7. | renunciation | : taking up a widow's way of life. |
| Line 10. | the great chaste Goddess | : Kannaki |
| Line 13. | Maturapathi | : Guardian of the city of Matura. Her description is the same as that of Shiva's consort, Parvati. |

Incidentally, Parvati as Meenakshi is the presiding deity of Madura.

Line 46. The ten strengths : the ten Paramitas which characterise the Enlightened One. They are Dana, Seela, Kshama, Veerya, Dhyana, Prajna, Upaya, Daya, Bala and Jnana.

Line 48. four-fold noble truths : suffering, cause of suffering, mitigation of suffering and way to mitigate suffering.

Line 55. The reference is to the Seats built by Indra in Pukar for charanas to use when expounding the tenets of Buddhism. Opinion has been expressed about this being a historical person, Mahendra, the brother of Asoka who is said to have built many Buddhist viharas in Pukar.

See S.N. Kandaswamy, Buddhism as Expounded in Manimekalai, p.3.

Line 63. This ancient city : Vanji

Line 66. Pithaka is literally 'a basket.' The Buddhist scriptures have a three-fold division : Vinaya Pithaka, Sutra Pithaka and Abhidharma Pithaka. These again, have numerous sub-divisions.

Line 71. Goddess : Goddess Manimekala

Line 81. Because of the large number of elephants in the King's army, the places looked like mountainous regions, for elephants are found in large numbers in mountains.

- Line 86. Kanaka, Vijaya : Aryan Kings
- Lines 87-88. Himalayan
stone of
holiness : as the stone had been
selected from the Himalayas
to sculpt the statue of
Kannaki, the Goddess of
Chastity. The sculpture
was meant for installation
in a temple and worship.

27. Listening to the Philosophers

(In *Vanji* city, *Manimekalai* goes by turn to logicians, *Saivites*, *Brahmavadins*, *Vaishnavites*, *Vedic philosophers*, *Ajivakas*, *Nirgranthas*, *Sankhyas*, *Vaiseshikas* and *Bhutavadins* and hears them explain their respective philosophies. In the end she expresses her dissatisfaction with their expositions and says that inference is of prime importance in the realisation of Truth).

"Teach me the faultless truth", she requested,

Drawing close to the philosophers there.

She met a Vedic logician at first

And said: "Speak to me of your doctrine."

"Veda Vyasa, *Kritakoti*, flawless

Jaimini were the three teachers who well

Formulated logical instruments

As ten, eight and six respectively,

The nature of things has to be found out

By direct perception and inference,

Similitude, authority, presumption,

Appropriateness, tradition, as also

Negation, correlation and occurrence.

There are five reasons for clear perception.

The form of things through sight, sound through
ears,

Smell by the closeness of the nose, taste through
tongue,

And the sense of touch through our body

Are these: such seeing, hearing, smelling

Eating and feeling tells us of sorrow

And joy: when life, the sense organs and mind

Conjoin with light, true perception sans

Exclusion, error and doubt of the object

Occurs as the appropriate place, name,

Genus, quality and also action.

The logic of inference is to deduct

The true nature of the inferable.

This is by three ways: through what is common,

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From effect to cause and cause to effect.
 The 'common' is when the means and its cause
 Are absent without an interaction: 30
 The trumpeting of an elephant in rut
 Makes one think: 'Here is a pachyderm.'
 When seeing floods one decides upon rains
 At the catchment, that be from effect to cause.
 When seeing dark clouds we say, 'it will rain.'
 That is inferring from cause to effect.
 To realise the unseen through the seen
 By means of any one of these causes
 In relation to past, present and future
 With the thing clearly seen by knowledge. 40
 Similitude comes through comparison
 Of a wild cow with a domestic cow.
 Authority comes through classical texts
 That tell us of paradise and hell.
 'The village is on the Ganges,' we are told
 But presumption points out to the bank.
 Appropriateness is recognised when
 The elephant-rider is given the goad.
 Tradition comes from racial memory
 Making us believe: 'This tree has a ghost.' 50
 Negation is the non-apprehension
 Of an unrelated thing after search.
 Correlation tells us of *Ravana's*
 Defeat when *Rama* is said to have won.
 Occurrence tells of a magnet's presence
 When a stick of iron revolves around.
 Fallacious knowledge is of eight kinds.
 Through direct contact, misconception, doubt,
 Wrong conviction, seeing without belief,
 Wrong assertion, knowing of what is known, 60
 And assumption. Of these, direct contact
 Stops with the admission of an object.
 Misconception is taking one for another
 As seeing silver in the mother-of-pearl.
 Doubt rises out of unsettled thinking
 As when we say: 'Is that a pillar or a man?'
 Wrong conviction takes place when a pillar

In a field is mistaken for a man.
 Not recognising an evil tiger
 That draws close, is seeing without belief.
 Wrong assertion is to say, 'a rabbit
 Has horns.' Words alone create this effect.
 Knowing of what is known is to suggest:
 'Fire's warmth is the antidote to winter.'

70

Assumption is acceptance of statements
 From others as: 'These are your parents.'
 These are the systems that accept logic:
Lokayata, Buddhism, the Sankhya.
Nyaya, Vaiseshika and Mimamsa.

The teachers of these six: *Brihaspati,*
Buddha, Kapila and Akshapada,
Kanada and Jaimini. At present

80

The six systems of logic in use are
 Through perception, inference, the *Shastras*,
 Analogy, presumption and negation."
 She left him. Meeting a Saivite who said
 'God is *Iswara*', she asked him: "Of what
 Nature is your divine, praised by you?"

"He is the life and body of the eight
 Known as the Sun, the Moon, the Doer and
 The five elements. The form of scriptures.
 As if in play he deals with creation.

90

His grace removes the sorrows of our birth.
 He has nothing beyond his own body.
 Such is our Lord," replied the Saivite.
 "The entire universe was born out of
 The egg of God," said one of that sect.
 "Narayana guards us," the Vaishnavite
 Said, lovingly reciting *Vishnu's* tales.

"Ritual for hands, prosody for feet,
 Astronomy for eyes, Etymology
 For ears, Articulation for nose,
 And Grammar for face; such is the Veda
 Self-born with neither beginning nor end."
 She heard the advocate of Veda speak
 And felt: "What these people speak of systems
 And usage do not hold together."

100

Going to a Jain scholar she queried:

"Who is your God? What do your Books say?"

"Our God pervades all things all the time

110

Everywhere, and looms as limitless

Knowledge. This system has five-fold subjects

Along with firm life, the four elements:

To feel that life-atom through touch and sight

They combine and divide among themselves.

Four elements, earth, water, fire and wind

Come together as hills, trees or bodies.

They also divide and disintegrate.

The knowledge of this process is called life.

Earth atoms are solid: water atoms

120

Cool and tasty, flow downwards and then soak

Underground: the fire atoms by nature

Emit heat and rise upwards all the time.

Wind atoms pass through space to cause movement.

Though these sub-atoms take various forms

They are beginningless, they are not harmed,

Nor are they destroyed. There is no birth

Of new atoms, nor do they enter others.

Ancient water atoms are not changed

To earth atoms. Nor are they fragmented.

130

Nor do they spread water like flattened rice.

They move, flow downwards, and move upwards
too.

They may come together as a mountain

Then become separate to be themselves.

They may gather as a very strong tree,

A bamboo with holes and a seed that grows.

Also as the round earth like a full moon.

As elements, these atoms decrease not

Nor do they come together as the whole.

As one, three-fourths, half or quarter they mix

140

And get their names by the majority content.

Unless they gather in this proportion

They will not assume the forms of hard earth

Fluid water, burning fire, swinging wind

And gain the respective capacities.

The realised souls alone see atoms.

Others cannot see the reality
 Within elements, even as a separate strand of hair
 Is not seen on the head in the twilight
 People who are born after their past deeds 150
 In births black, blue black, green, red, gold and
 white
 In the end attain the state of non-birth
 By going through the birth of pure whiteness.
 Those who do not want a life of sorrows
 Deserve birth in the life of pure whiteness.
 This is the nature of the righteous path.
 That which is contrary to this manner,
 Know that as the way of retrogression.
 Gain and loss, the coming of obstacles,
 The inevitability of these, 160
 Sorrow and joy, their riddance, birth and death:
 All these originate even in womb.
 Joy and sorrow are also atomic.
 It is past fate that works in later births.
 This is the teaching in *Markali's Book*.
 The maid gave up these confused arguments
 And approached a *Nigrantha* ascetic.
 "Who is your Lord? What are your Books?
 Explain to me the waves of the teaching,
 Its argument and conclusion." He began to speak. 170
 "Whom the *Indras* salute is our God.
 His systems are: the Movement Principle,
 The Principle of Stationariness,
 Time, the sky, faultless life and sub-atoms,
 Good deeds and bad, and also the bondage
 That comes of these, and Release mark these ten.
 A thing may remain as it is expounded in
 This teaching: or it may grow different
 By association. Eternal or
 Impermanent be, and in a moment 180
 Through knowledge appear, exist or die,
 The three-fold states that can never be changed.
 A margosa seed's sprouting and growth
 Is eternal: the seed's withering tells us
 Of the temporal. Even as the green gram

Disappears when made into a sweet.
 The Movement Principle pervades all through
 Making things function in keeping with their nature.
 Such too the Stationary Principle
 Which makes everything remain static.

190

Time is of the nature that makes a brief
 Moment and also the immense *Kalpa*.
 The sky gives space for all created things
 And allows them to spread as they wish to.
 Life resides in the body and helps it
 To enjoy taste and other sensations.

An atom is the body and other
 Forms leading to good and also bad deeds.
 To change the path of these, experience
 The result of deeds and cut off bondage
 Is realisation." Following him

200

Another spoke saying: "This is *Sankhya*.
 The primary element is the things
 Which is beyond conception: it has three
 Qualities, is above mind, is the one Source
 From which begin all created things.
 From consciousness rises *Maan* or *Buddhi*,
 From it emanates space, and from that air,
 Here appears fire and from it springs
 The nature of water. Ultimately

210

From this rises earth. A combination
 Of all these gives birth to the mind. That mind
 Bustles to give rise to the ego sense,
 The space creates sounds heard by the ear,
 The wind generates the feeling of touch,
 The fire gives light seen by the eye
 The water leads to taste for the tongue
 And the earth gives the sense of smell for nose.
 These spoken above become work-organs
 As speech, hands, feet, anus and organ
 For generation. The transformation

220

Of elements thus appears as hill,
 Tree and others, to become the wide earth,
 And return by their way to merge within
 An endless dissolution. Till that happens

It is spread everywhere, eternal.
 The *Purusha*, easy to know, without
 The three qualities, not related to
 The five senses, not the place for the growth
 Of creation, but the means of knowing 230
 All that, the one spreading everywhere,
 Is eternal, the consciousness within.
 We become conscious of Twenty-five things.
 Earth, water, fire, wind and the immense space;
 Body, mouth, eyes, nose and the ear; taste
 Light, touch, sound and the sense of smell;
 speech, hands,
 Feet, anus and generative organs;
 Mind, *buddhi*, ego-sense and will-power,
 Along with Atman that is life, the count
 Is complete. Thus she heard his description. 240
 "O *Vaisheshika*! Speak your doctrine!"
 She said. "Six-fold the system that contains
 Faultless substance, quality, action and
 Genus, species and collectivity.
 Of these, substance has quality and action
 Causing everything. That has nine heads.
 Earth, water, fire, wind, space, the directions
 Time, soul and the mind; of these the earth has
 The qualities of sound, touch, colour, taste
 And smell; the remaining four have qualities 250
 One less than the order mentioned above.
 Matter is possessed of these qualities:
 Sound, touch, sight, smell and taste: immensity
 And smallness, hardness and softness, greatness,
 Feebleness and shape of form; directions
 Many as the right side and the left side.
 Matter and quality are intended
 For action. The higher universal
 Tells us of true nature; movement and stillness
 Are common, so too death and life; that is 260
 The lower universal; the atom
 Is special. Union is the nature
 Of the quality and its possession."
 Thus he. "O *Bhutavadi*, speak!" she said.

"When *aathi* flowers, sugar and the rest
 Are mixed, wine is made. Life too appears
 By the mixing of elements, vanishes
 When they separate as sounds from a drum.
 Conscious elements produce life within
 And unconscious ones produce the body
 Each appearing through their elements.
 This is the truth. Words different from this
 And other facts are from Materialists.
 Sense perception is valid. Inference
 Is false. This birth and its effects conclude
 Now. Talk of other births is falsity."
 Having heard of all paths, the maid now thought.
 "Though they are not right, I shall not dispute."
 As she knew of her births, she laughed at him
 Who asked: "Is there one who knows his past
 births?
 What you say is not beyond doubt as it may be
 Due to God-induced swoon or dream
 That confounds the minds of persons in spell.
 "How do you recognise your parents
 In this world if not through inference?
 Do not say that without sense perception
 Truth is not found: but for casting a doubt
 You cannot explain this." In her disguise
 She spoke and thus learnt of the five-fold
 systems.

270

280

Line 5 ff. Describes the *Pramana Vāda* of the Vaidika system.

Veda Vyase : Author of the Mahabharata, the
 eighteen Puranas and the Brahma
 Sutras.

Kritakoti : Bodayana, author of *Kritakoti*,
 a work of Mimamsa; also known
 by the name of his work.

Jaimini : Name of a celebrated sage and philosopher, founder of the Mimamsa school of philosophy.

Mimamsa is one of the six chief Darsanas or systems of Indian philosophy. Jaimini is the founder of Poorvamimamsa (also known as Karma Mimamsa) and Badarayana is supposed to have founded the Uttara Mimamsa (also known as Brahma Mimamsa).

Line 8. Veda Vyasa is said to have formulated all the ten Pramanas (logical instruments); Kritakoti only eight and Jaimini only six.

Lines 9-13. Describes the ten Pramanas that posit as many approaches to understanding the nature of things.

Line 27. common : samanya anumana

Lines 53-54. In the Ramayana, Rama the Prince of Ayodhya kills Ravana, the king of Lanka.

Lines 45-46. It is usual for us to leave out 'on the banks of' when speaking of the village on the Ganges.

Lines 47-48. When the elephant-rider asks for a 'thotti' or weapon, it is obvious that he means the 'ankusa', the special type of goad used for controlling elephants.

Line 58. Fallacious knowledge : known as Bramana abhasas.

Lines 61-62. This is known as 'nirvikarpa' sight.

Lines 71-72. In reality there can never be a rabbit with horns.

Line 76. As there is no other way, one has to go by what others say hoping others do not tell a lie.

- Lines 89-91. This is known as Ashtamoortham in Saiva Siddhanta.
- Line 94. There is nothing beyond Siva; He contains all and is peerless.
- Lines 96-97. This is known as Brahma vada
egg of God : lit. Hiranyagarbha, a golden fetus.
Name of Brahma.
- Lines 98-99. Vaishnavites consider it best to recite the stories of Vishnu in groups.
- Lines 100-105. Veda Vada
- Line 110 ff. Ajivaka doctrine
- Lines 148-149. As we see only a single mass of dark top.
- Line 165. Markali Kosa was the third thirthankara of the Ajivaka sect.
- Line 167. The Nigranthas are also known as Digambaras in Jain religion.
- Line 171. Arhat who is worshipped by the forty two Pavandras, thirty two Viyantharendras, twenty two Karoendras, the Moon, the Sun, the Narendra and the Mrigendra.
- Line 176. those ten : these ten systems of the Nirgranthas.
- Lines 185-186. As the green gram is cooked very soft to make the sweet 'kummayam' and it becomes a paste, losing its earlier form.
- Line 192. Kalpa : the largest unit of time
- Line 199. these : good and bad deeds

- Line 207. Maan : The 'Mahas' element.
- Lines 265-266. When the three are mixed, the quality of inebriation appears.
- Line 273. Materialists : Lokayatas
- Line 289. Though ten systems (Vedic logicians, Saiva, Brahma-
vadin, Vaishnava, Vedic ritualists, Ajivakas, Nirgran-
thas, Sankhyas, Vaiseshikas Bhutavadins) are spoken
of in the canto, Sathanar refers to them as five
because of the general usage which clubs together
the first five (as deriving from Vedas), speak of
Ajivakas and Nirgranthas as one and the last three
separately.

28. Entering the City of Kanchi

(After listening to the expositions of the different philosophers, *Manimekalai* enters the city of *Vanji* and converses with her grandfather, *Masattuvan*. *Masattuvan* speaks about his own life based on *dharma* and the future birth of *Kovalan* and *Kannaki*. He then directs her to go to *Kanchi*. She goes there. The King requests her to bring succour to his suffering subjects. Accordingly she feeds the hungering millions with the help of the *Amuda Surabhi*. She then worships Sage *Aravana* and requests him to initiate her into *Buddhist dharma*).

Wishing to see *Aravana* and her mothers,
 She crossed the outer cantonment
 That was crowded as if the King's soldiers
 And enemy kings were battling for the fort.
Vanji's moat was like a rainbow garment
 With scented water used by the housewives
 For washing tresses, flowing through tunnels,
 Water with powders used by youthful men
 And women bathing in artificial pools,
 Sweet-smelling waters flung through syringes
 And horns, to celebrate the King's birthday;
 Pure water from the hands of householder-devotees
 Washing the feet of sages;
 Water that flows from pots in wayside rooms
 Filled and scented by the charitable.
 Water from well-to-do homes where they grind
 Spices, taking care to mix'em properly.
 As only such water flowed all over,
 Gharials, crocodiles and fishes
 Lost the smell of raw flesh on their body.
 Lotus and other lily varieties
 Spread on the surface with the bees buzzing.
 Close to the high fort with machines atop
 That could rain down arrows on enemies,
 Was the green forest: she reached the fort gate
 That was like a divided silver hill

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Artfully made, white-washed bright like moonlight,
And had flags waving, and entered the town.

Here the broad street that housed the soldiers

Who guarded the other city limits;

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The street where lived fish-vendors, the sellers

Of white-salt, saleswomen of wine, pedlars

Of cakes and rice pudding, sheep's meat hawkers,

Sellers of betel leaves and sweet spices;

Streets filled with potters, coppersmiths, bronzesmiths,

Goldsmiths and metal workers, carpenters

Of wood, masons with building expertise,

Painters who create divine formations

That assure us of grace, shoe-makers and tailors,

40

Garland-makers, astronomers, also

Musicians recreating through human

Voice and lute, the three reaches in terms of

Enjoyable tunes and their melodies;

The streets with cutters of conch-shell bangles

And proficient stringers of gleaming pearls;

The street of dancing women containing

Adepts in subjective and public dance.

The bazaar street with hillocks of grains

Of eight varieties, the street of minstrels,

50

Rhapsodists and specialists in rhythm;

The street of courtesans who give pleasure;

The street of weavers who work capably

With thin threads that cannot be seen by the eyes;

The streets with grand homes of touchstone experts;

The street with sellers of gem varieties;

The street of brahmins intent on their work;

The street of officials and ministers;

The street where top administrators live;

Public halls, assemblies, street junctions, squares;

The street with trainers of new elephants

60

And horses decorated with gold beads:

Crossing them, she saw artificial hills

With high water-falls; attractive woodlands;

Places with flowing water that would please

Even gods should they come down to the earth;

Roads and rooms, gold-gleaming assembly halls;
 Painted halls for performing askeśis;
 She saw these with joy and in her new garb
 Entered the hermitage used for resting
 By people who fly in the air, and known as 70
Indra's Temple, and where the ascetics
 Praise the faultless *Buddha*. There the maiden
 Bowed at the feet of *Koṭṭavan's* father,
 An ascetic now, and spoke to him of her
 Vessel of charity; how the King of
Sāvaka gained faultless wealth through giving;
 How she brought him to the island to show
 Him the Seat which told him of his past births;
 Even as he recognised, a goddess
 Appeared and comforted him: and how 80
 She heard of *Pukar's* loss and the escape
 Of her mothers and *Aravana* thence;
 How the King of *Sāvaka* returned home;
 And how she reached this town from that island;
 How she had in her assumed garb
 Listened to the many philosophers;
 How none of the teachings of those systems
 Were accepted by her listening soul;
 How she had come in search of the great sage
 To listen to the *dharma* of the *Buddha*. 90
 When she had done, he spoke: "O pure maiden!
 It is my good fortune that I met you.
 Young girl! As the prosperous city burned
 Due to the evil deeds of thy parents
 And I heard of their sad death, and as I
 Deserved the loving *dharma* of the *Buddha*,
 I found family life an illusion,
 And that wealth and this physical body
 Are not more lasting than the millet grain,
 Which made me take to *dharmaic* askeśis. 100
 Do hear why I came to this city
 Named after the lovely rattan creeper.
 There was once a King of the *Kuttuvās*
 Who stamped his bow-sign on the *Himavant*.
 He entered this garden with his women

Who had coral lips and very thin waists.
 Some sages who fly the path of dark clouds
 In the skies, and were then returning from
 The *Samanoli* Hill of Sri Lanka
 Decided to rest here. They got down
 In this garden, as the time was ripe for
 The King's good fortune. As the visitors
 Rested on a stone, the King who had done
 Good deeds in past births, praised the ascetics,
 Washed their lotus-like feet, and then offered
 Wholesome food to them, that had the six tastes
 And four varieties. With his courtiers
 He prayed to them, doing many honours.
 To him the sages spoke of sorrow
 That attends birth, and the joy that follows
 The state of non-birth, the holy statements
 Of *Buddha* that are nectar to the soul.
 There was to your father a forebear
 Nine-times removed, named *Kovalan* who was
 A close friend of the King mentioned above.
 He too listened to the words of *dharma*
 And gave away all his ancestral wealth
 And the many crores he had earned as well
 To mendicants, all within a week's time.
 Taking to asceticism, he built
 A sky-reaching temple in gleaming white
 That helped mortals overcome their sorrow.
 Planning to pray there, I was on my way
 When the holy sages of this city
 Told me: '*Pukar* will be eaten by the sea.'
 These good words led to my staying here.
 Maid who walks the path of *dharma*! Listen!
 Your father whose evil past led him
 Will be born among gods, thanks to good deeds.
 After births to work out the evil past
 He will listen to *dharma* from *Buddha*
 Seated under the *Bodhi* tree within
Kapilavastu, and himself take to
 Asceticism with his wife to gain
 Release.' I heard this forecast from wise men

110

120

130

140

And realised its import. O maiden!
 I shall also listen to *Buddha* then.
 Have you not heard of your future from
Duvathigan who dwells in the pillar?
 I heard of this from Sage *Aravana*. 150
 As *Kanchi* is the stage for thy good deeds
 O maid! he too has gone to that city.
 On the same day the sage journeyed forth
 Your mothers too accompanied him.
 Hear some more, O bejewelled lady!
Kanchi with the golden fort has lost its
 Glory. People are dying. Rains have failed.
 As there is none to feed the ascetics
 They have come to this city. Medicine
 Are you for life! It is your duty 160
 To save that land like water-laden clouds."
 When he was done, the maid saluted him
 Took the divine pot in her lovely hands,
 Rose above from the west of *Vanji* town
 With flag-waving fort, and travelled northwards.
 She found the city once as glorious
 As if it were *Indra's* capital on earth,
 Now poverty-stricken and sans its beauty.
 With her heart full of compassion, the maid
 Went around the fort right-wards, and got down 170
 Into the central part of the city.
 She prayed at the temple built by the King's
 Brother to *Buddha*, who had sat under
 The *Bodhi* tree which had golden branches
 And fresh green leaves rivalling emerald.
 She went to a garden to the south-west
 And rested. To the King of the country
 An official went, saluted and said:
 '*Kovalan's* daughter who renounced the world
 Is famous throughout the *Jambu* island. 180
 She has come to the garden of *dharma*
 Like life-giving rain, holding in her hand
 The nectar-vessel.' When he heard these words
 The King remembered thankfully: "What the
 Pillar-statue forecast is happening."

With his courtiers he went willingly
 To the place where the good maid was staying.
 "Due to faulty reign or fault in tapas,
 Or transgression in female chastity,
 O righteous maid! The whole of my good land 190
 Is blasted now by a terrible drought.
 To me in agony came a Goddess.
 "Sorrow not! Thanks to your past good deeds
 A maid will appear. From her vessel
 Will come forth medicine to save this land.
 By her grace and orders of *Indra*
 Heavy, welcome rains will pour down on earth.
 Since the coming of that maid to this town
 There will be many deeds of righteousness.
 The clouds may go dry, but never the earth. 200
 Build a lake and garden in this place
 As if the full *Gomukhi* lake structured
 Nobly by the ancients had come here
 Along with *Manipallavam*.' After
 The Goddess vanished, I constructed this."
 He showed her around. Delighted to see
 That garden which looked like an island,
 The good lady spoke of 'the holy Seat
 That showed me my past,' and caused to be built
 A lotus Seat for the *Buddha*; also 210
 A temple for *Dipatilakai* and
 Goddess *Manimekala* where people
 Could worship; she then arranged through the King
 Festivals and special celebrations.
 Herself worthy of being saluted,
 The maid bowed and prayed to the goddesses.
 She placed on the lotus Seat the nectar pot
 That was medicine to the hunger-sickness
 And pronounced: 'Welcome, all living beings!'
 Hearing the words of the lovely girl 220
 Folk speaking eighteen languages came there.
 Among them the blind, the deaf and the lame;
 Guardianless people, the dumb, the sick;
 Ascetics and people ill with hunger;
 People who had grown poor through idleness;

- | | | |
|----------------|--------------------------------|--|
| Line 47. | subjective and public dance | : dances meant for exclusive showing (classical) to a select aristocratic audience, and those exhibited to the general public (folk). |
| Line 54. | | experts who knew all about gold. |
| Line 73. | Kovalan's father | : Masattuvan |
| Lines 75-76. | King of Savaka | : Punyarajan who had been Aaputh- ren in an earlier birth. |
| Line 79. | recognised goddess | : recognised his bones that lay on the Manipallavam beach. : Dipatilakai |
| Line 89. | great sage | : Aravana |
| Line 91. | he | : Masattuvan |
| Line 94. | evil deeds | : Kovalan's causing the death of Sangaman in an earlier birth. |
| Lines 103-104. | | The reference here is to the King, Imayavaramban Netuncheralatan. |
| Line 109. | | Samanoli Hill in Sri Lanka is now called Adam's Peak. |
| Line 116. | six tastes | : bitter, pungent, sour, salty, astring- ent and sweet. |
| Line 117. | four varieties | : gulping, munching, licking, drinking. |
| Line 134. | this city | : Vanji |
| Line 150. | of this | : of the forecast |
| Line 177. | | The King referred to here was a Chola, Killi, the younger brother of Killi Valavan. |

29. Manimekalai Receives the Dharma

(Sage Aravana recounts to *Manimekalai* the sequence of events culminating in the destruction of *Pukar*. *Peelivalai* entrusted to *Kambala Chetti* her son born of the *Chola* King and requested him to hand over the boy to the King. The *Chetti's* boat capsized in the sea and the boy was lost. The *Chetti* informed the King of the tragedy. The King was deeply disturbed and forgot to celebrate the *Indra* festival. *Indra's* curse destroyed the *Chola* capital. The Sage also tells her how she had been named after *Kovalan's* family deity, Goddess *Manimekala*. *Manimekalai* requested him to illumine her about *Buddhist* tenets. Accordingly he teaches her the *Buddhist dharma*).

Sage Aravana whose tongue always spoke
Dharma, blessed the girl who saluted him:
"Peelivalai, the Naga princess, gave
Her son born of victorious Killi
To the Kambala merchant who had come
To the island. He bowed and took the boy
Into his ship. At midnight the ship was wrecked
Off the coast. The merchant who lost the ship
Could not find the boy. To the king he came
And gave the dire news. The King was saddened
And spent all his time searching for him
Forgetting to arrange the festival.

10

A great ancestor of your father
Was once caught in the shark-infested sea
Where his ship sank: as a golden needle
Stitching a green carpet, for seven days
He struggled bravely, against all evil,
Because of his pure character and his
Adherence to the five-fold discipline. *Indra's*
White carpet shuddered, and he came to know.
To the Goddess he said: 'A good merchant
Who will become a realised Teacher
Is caught in the sea. Save him!' The Goddess
Did so. Wise sages told the good merchant

20

After he had been taken from the sea:
 'She helps mankind cross life's difficulties,
 For *dharma* to rule, and the *dharma* wheel
 Move through all births.' Rendered grateful
 By these memories, Your father named you
 After her. On the same day 30
 She came in a dream and forecast as true
 Your renunciation. Like the curse
 Of gentle Goddess *Manimekala*
 Was the destructive word of Lord *Indra*
 Who had been denied the annual
 Festive offerings! The city went under
 The sea. Your mother as also me
 Came to this town only for your sake."
 The maid bowed at Sage *Aravana*'s feet.
 "*Dipatilakāi* who praised the Seat 40
 Of *Buddha* also spoke in this manner.
 Therefore, though in that lovely town I heard
 In disguise, the inner truth of systems
 That speak in varied ways in their scriptures,
 I did not welcome to my inner mind
 The five that seemed as false as my dress.
 O holy Sage! Grant me the true teaching!"
 "I will, O maiden. Listen carefully.
 The first *Buddha* spoke of two instruments
 Of logic: perception and inference. 50
 Perception is feeling by senses but
 Excludes name, species quality and action,
 As these conjoin with inference too.
 'Causal', 'consequential', and 'common'
 Are the three ways of inference. These may
 Mislead us except the second as when:
 'Fire has smoke!' All the other instruments
 Follow but the method of inference.
 Its five divisions are: proposition,
 Reason, example, application and 60
 Conclusion. The first: 'This mountain has fire.'
 Reason: 'Because it smokes.' The example:
 'Like a well-formed stove.' Its application:
 The mountain too smokes.' Thus the conclusion:

'Whatever emits smoke, that contains fire.'
 To say, 'That which has no fire does not smoke,
 Like water' would be contradictory
 To the proposition. Then would it be
 An example of contrareity.

If pure effect is of the nature of
 The example, we say; 'Sound is fleeting.'
 The proposition is: 'Because it is made.'
 This is the attribute of the subject.
 Then to say, 'that which is made is fleeting
 Like a pot' is a similarity

70

Of the subject. The contrary statement
 For the above: 'That which is not fleeting
 Is not made, like the space.' For the mode of
 Connective inference, a good subject
 Could be: 'There is no pot in this empty space.'
 To add: 'because it is not visible'

80

Gives us the attribute of the subject.
 To say: 'we have not seen a rabbit's horns
 As it has none' is that kind of subject.
 The contrary statement for that: 'What is,
 Is seen as a gooseberry on one's palm.'
 It is thus that Reason proves Existence.
 To ask: 'How did the smoke prove the subject?'
 By the inference that 'where there is smoke
 There is fire,' as also the negative

90

Concomitance: 'Where there is no fire, there
 No smoke is', the smoke proved the fact of fire.
 The smoke's rising in upward direction
 And its spreading in wavy directions
 Being fire's characteristics, the place
 Where it is darkling upwards and spreading
 Around, should also be said to have fire.

This identical inference then would prove:
 'He who saw an ass and a dancing girl
 Together in one place, if he happens
 To see the ass there later, must infer
 Also the presence of the dancing girl
 In the same place.' This would of course be wrong.
 'There is no smoke without fire.' This be

100

Negative concomitance. However,
To say: 'There is no fox's tail on the
Mane of a donkey that has no dog's tail'
And then infer elsewhere the existence
Of the dog's tail through the tail of the fox
Is not correct either. Application

110

And conclusion that are with the subject
Also go along with the Example:
Proposition, Reason and Example
Are of two types: valid and invalid.
The valid contains what is apparent,
Its positive attributes and all that
Differentiates it from the other
As its natural principle. Hold on
To it as the correct proposition.

120

An instance: 'Sound is non-eternal or
Eternal': What is apparent is sound.
Its positive attribute is, being
Eternal': or non-eternal. Reason
Is of three types: the characteristics
Of the subject, its similarity
And the absence of contrary statement.

For the similarity to be proved,
The attributes should be applicable
Generally. To prove that sound is fleeting
Bring in: 'It is non-eternal like a pot.'

130

To prove the contrary statement could be:
'That which is non-eternal is not made
Like the space.' Being made as also
Appearing in the act of making
Are present in the subject and also
In its similar subject, nor is it

For the contrary statement, hence this is
A valid reason. Faultless example
Is of two types: similar attributes
And dissimilar. The former goes thus:

140

'That which is made is non-eternal like
A pot.' A dissimilar example:
'Where the conclusion is not, reason is absent.'
These are valid means for proper proof.

Proposition, Reason, and Example
 Which are invalid: fallacious proposition,
 Fallacious Reason and the fallacious
 Example. Of these fallacious proposition
 Is of nine types: that which is contrary 150
 To perception, inference, a statement
 Made at the beginning, established fact,
 And established authority as also
 What the other cannot perceive, nor know
 The proposition itself, nor agree
 With the proposition and conclusion
 Nor reiteration to what is known.
 Of these, the first is speaking contrary to
 Perception: 'Sound is not seen by the ear.'
 What is contrary to inference comes
 When that is made by contrariety: 160
 'The non-eternal pot is eternal.'
 Fallacious statement comes through such speech:
 'My mother is barren.' What goes against
 Established fact is speaking in this wise:
 'The shining moon above is not the moon.'
 Against established authority such statements:
 When a *Vaiseshika*, who holds all things
 Non-eternal says, 'This is eternal.'
 What the other cannot perceive is not
 A valid proposition. If a *Buddhist* 170
 Were to tell a *Sankhya* philosopher
 'Sound is non-eternal,' that then becomes
 Fallacious from the side of the *Sankhya*
 As the *Sankhya* is an eternalist.
 When the other person does not even understand
 The proposition itself, it would be
 Fallacious, as when a *Sankhya* speaks to
 A *Buddhist* of opposite views: 'The soul
 Has the faculty of understanding,'
 Since the latter does not believe in a soul. 180
 When the other does not agree with the
 Proposition and conclusion, that is
 Fallacious, as when a *Vaiseshika*
 Speaks to a *Buddhist*: 'The soul is the cause

For pleasure and the rest,' as the latter
 Does not accept the reality of pleasure
 And the soul. The last of these is
 Repeating to the other what he knows,
 As telling a *Buddhist*: 'Sound is fleeting.'
 Since that also happens to be his thought
 There is no need for a repetition. 190
 Fallacious reasoning is of three types:
 The Unaccepted, the Doubtful and the
 Contradictory. The Unaccepted
 Has four divisions: what both do not accept,
 Where the predication is not accepted,
 Where the reason is dubious, and where
 The character is held non-existent.
 'Non-eternal sound is seen' thus becomes
 Unacceptable to both. If it is 200
 Said: 'The sound has evolved and so it is fleeting,'
 The predication ceases to be as
 The *Sankhya* cannot accept the statement
 That goes against the evolution from
 Consciousness. Where the reason is held out
 As questionable: 'Is it smoke or snow?'
 But accept: 'It is smoke, hence there is fire.'
 In projecting a thing whose character
 Is not recognised by the other:
 'The space is existent because of sound.'
 This becomes fallacious when the other 210
 Does not believe in space itself. The Doubtful
 Has six types: That which is common to both,
 That which is not in either, the middle term
 Which refers to some similarities,
 Or which refers to some of both, and where
 It is not the reason. When the reason
 Is uncertain in both: 'Sound is cognised
 Hence non-eternal.' Cognition pertains
 To eternal and non-eternal things. 220
 'Is it non-eternal like a pot or
 Eternal as the space?' would then prove the
 Fallacy. When the reason is absent
 In both the subject and its opposite:

'Sound is eternal as it is heard.' Then
 Audibility belongs only to
 The proposition, and not to subject
 Or its opposite; hence this creates an
 Uncertainty, and belongs to the side
 Of the Doubtful. When the middle term 230
 Pertains to some of the similar things
 And agrees with all things dissimilar,
 Suppose it is said: 'Sound is not produced
 By endeavour, as it is non-eternal.'
 The reason of non-eternality
 Comes from the proposition which abides
 In lightning and space. But sound abides in
 Lightning which is fleeting and in the space
 Which is eternal. Non-eternal things
 Like the pot are comparable and so 240
 The doubt arises: will it appear
 In the non-eternality of pots?
 Again, will it not appear in the
 Non-eternality of the lightning?
 When the middle term pertains to
 Some dissimilarities and all of
 Similarities: 'Sound is produced by
 Endeavour as it is non-eternal.'
 The reason is found in lightning but not
 In space and is found in all things like pots. 250
 The doubt arises then: 'Will it not be
 Non-eternal like the lightning? Again,
 'Will it appear as non-eternal
 As in the case of pots?' The middle term
 When it is found appropriate in one
 Attribute of both the similar and
 Dissimilar sides: 'Sound is eternal
 As it is formless.' The formlessness is
 Found in space and minutest atoms
 That are eternal. Again the minute 260
 Atoms do have form. The reason is found
 In happiness, but not in things like a pot.
 Giving such a reason that is found
 In only part of the proposition

And its contrariety is fallacious.

Thus: 'Is formlessness eternal like space?

'Is formlessness fleeting like happiness?'

The Doubtful Reason occurs also when

The given term cannot be the reason.

'Sound is not eternal as it is the

270

Product of endeavour.' For that act

Things like the pot stand witness. However,

To say: 'Sound is eternal as it is

Heard, like the principle of sound' can but

Create doubt in premise and conclusion.

Contradiction if explained properly

Has four types: when the given reason

Changes the premise itself; or changes

The attribute of the premise; or changes

280

The determining clause; or seeks to change

The nature of the determining clause.

The given reason changes the premise

As when it is said: 'Sound is eternal,

As it is the product of endeavour.'

Since what is produced is non-eternal,

The reason goes against the concept of

Eternality, and goes on to prove

Non-eternality, hence fallacious.

The given reason when it changes the

290

Attribute of the premise goes this way:

'The sense organs like eyes, if thought about,

Are separate, as they are attached to

Another, like the mattress and the cot.'

The reason, 'as they are attached' takes the

Sense organs like eyes to be not joined

As the mattress and the cot are separate,

And like a man who owns separate things

Like the mattress and the cot, makes the soul

Which has no form and is the master of

300

Sense organs like the eyes, have its own form.

The fallacy arose thus by making

The formless soul also have limbs that are

Not part of it. This is fallacious,

When the determining clause of what is

Proposed is changed by the reason which was
 Meant to prove it: 'Truth is not matter,
 Nor action, nor quality. As matter,
 Action and quality are separate,
 Like the premise and its attribute.'

The reason that showed up as separate
 Matter, quality and action that were
 Thought of together, does not possess the
 General truth common to all the three,
 The example does not have anything
 Except the premise and the attribute.
 As there is no reason to prove what is
 Stated in the determining clause
 This is fallacy of contradiction.

310

When the reason given goes on to prove
 What is contrary to the form of the
 Determining clause itself, the reason
 Stated earlier becomes now the truth.
 The truth of the stated matter, quality
 And action make it contrary. And hence
 This too is fallacious. The examples
 That resemble truth but are fallacious
 Are of two kinds as stated earlier.
 Of these, the fallacy of example
 By similarity is of five kinds.

320

Where, the stated instrument of reason
 Is incomplete; where the predicate
 Of the proposition is incomplete;
 Where both the reason and the predicate
 Are incomplete; where connective thought
 Is not given; and where the connection
 Is inferred from the predicate's nature.
 The example by dissimilarity

330

In five-fold: where the predicate remains;
 Where the middle term is proved contrary;
 Where both are proved contrary; absence of
 A clear reason; and speaking in terms
 That upset the argument. To take up
 The problem where the given reason is
 Incomplete: 'Sound is eternal, as it is formless:

340

That which is formless is eternal and
 Is seen in the atom.' The example
 Of atom which is eternal and with
 Form, is appropriate for the predicate
 But is not formless as the reason states.
 Where in the example given to us
 The predicate of the proposition
 Is incomplete: 'Sound is eternal as
 It is formless. Whatever is formless
 Is eternal like intellect.' Here
 Intellect which is shown for example
 Is formless and non-eternal. Therefore
 It satisfies the formlessness spoken
 By the reason, but not the predicate
 Which speaks of eternity. Now to
 The example where both the predicate
 And the reason are incomplete: Again
 This is of two varieties: of what is
 Existent and what is non-existent.
 The former shows the incompleteness
 Of the predicate and the reason in
 What is existent: 'Sound is eternal
 As it is formless. That which is formless
 Is eternal like the pot'. The object
 Of example being the pot which is
 Created, the predicate which speaks of
 Eternality and the middle term
 Which is formlessness are both incomplete.
 The incompleteness of the predicate
 And the reason in what is non-existent:
 'Sound is non-eternal because it is
 Formless. That which has a form of its own
 Is non-eternal like the space.
 In this example, the non-eternal
 Nature of the predicate, and the form
 Found as the quality in the reason,
 Make fallacious the conclusion to say:
 'Space is non-existent.' For the person
 Who concludes 'space is existent,' this is
 Fallacious as the space is eternal

350

360

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380

As also formless. In the fallacy
 Where the connective thought is not given,
 Only the predicate and the reason
 Are spoken of: 'Sound is non-eternal
 As it is made. But without saying that
 'That thing which is made is non-eternal' 390
 If the example is given: 'The pot
 Shows production and non-eternality,'
 The connective thought will not be present.
 Where the connection is inferred from
 The nature of the predicate, to say:
 'Sound is non-eternal as it is made'
 And state: 'What is made is non-eternal.'
 Without thinking of the predicate through
 The reason, it is the other way round.
 'Whatever is non-eternal, is produced.' 400
 If so, the predicate is proved without
 The reason given. This is fallacious.
 Examples by dissimilarity
 When taken up: where the middle term proves
 The contrariety and the predicate
 Remains: 'Sound is eternal because
 It is formless.' If as an example
 It is said: 'That which is non-eternal
 Is not formless, like an atom.'
 As atom which is used as an example 410
 Is eternal and has a form, there is
 Contrariety to the formlessness
 In the reason, and the eternality
 In the predicate remains. Next, where
 The contrariety to the predicate is made
 And reason remains: 'Sound is eternal
 As it is formless. Suppose it is said,
 'That which is non-eternal, that has no
 Form either, like fate.' The example of fate
 Is formless but is non-eternal --420
 Too. Hence, the eternality in the
 Predicate is absent in the example
 While the formless in the reason
 Remains. Where both predicate and reason

Are proved contrary by the example
 We have fallacy again. This is of
 Two kinds: where both predicate and reason
 Are proved contrary by the existent;
 And that where both predicate and reason
 Are proved contrary by the non-existent. 430
 Of the former that proves contrariety
 To the predicate and reason. 'Sound is
 Eternal as it is formless.' To this
 Reason if it is argued: 'That thing
 Which is non-eternal is also
 Formless like the space,' for those who assert
 By contrariety that space is matter,
 Space being eternal and formless,
 The eternality in the predicate
 And formlessness in reason are fallacious. 440
 Where predicate and the reason are proved
 Contrary by what is non-existent:
 'Sound is non-eternal as it has form.'
 To this reasoning when it is argued:
 'That which is non-eternal, has no form,
 Like space' in terms of contrariety,
 For him who says that space is not matter
 Since space is for him non-existent,
 The predicate's non-eternality
 And the form in reason are fallacious. 450
 Negation of the argument is found in
 Not stating the absence of reason.
 'Sound is eternal as it is not made.'
 By not speaking in terms of negation
 To this: 'That thing which is non-eternal
 That is a thing not made,' and by saying
 'Because we saw in the pot what is made
 And what is non-eternal,' negation
 Is not proved and this becomes fallacious. 460
 Perverse negation is stating in terms
 That upsets the argument: 'Sound is
 Eternal as it has form.' After this,
 Instead of saying that, 'where there is no
 Eternality there is no form too,'

If one were to say, 'where there is no form,
 There is no eternality either,'
 The negation itself gets perverted.
 By not succumbing to the fallacious
 Reasonings and fallacious inferences
 Explained by me and by examining
 Yourself through perception and inference,
 Learn clearly about truth and non-truth."

470

Line 3 ff. For an account of the union of Peelivalai and
 the Chola King, see canto 24, 'Towards Aaputhran's
 Kingdom.'

Line 12. The festival is honour of Indra.

Lines 15-16. The merchant is compared to a golden needle,
 while the sea is seen as a green carpet.

Lines 19-20. See Canto 14, lines 29-30.

five-fold Non-killing, abstaining from ine-
 discipline : briating drink, avoiding falsehood,
 avoiding lust and thievery.

Line 26. She : Goddess Manimekala

Line 29. your father : Kovalan

Line 43. She had disguised herself as a monk. It turned
 out that as far as she was concerned the different
 philosophies turned out to be as false as her own
 disguise.

Line 46. the five : see canto 27, line 289.

Line 105. i.e., the negative of the assertion, known as 've-
 tirekam.'

- Line 113. Paksha, Hetu and Drishtanta.
- Lines 149-156. Pratyaksha viruddham, Anumana viruddham, Suva-
chana viruddham, Loke viruddham, Agama virud-
dham, Aprasiddha viseshanam, Aprasiddha viseshiyam
Aprasiddha upayam and Aprasiddha sammandham.
- Line 192. Asiddham, Anikantikam and Viruddham Upaya-
siddham, Anyatha-siddham, Siddha-siddham and
Asraya-siddham.
- Line 213. Sadharana, Asadharana, Sapakkaika, Desavirudhi
Vipakkavyapi, Vipakkaika Desavirudhi Sappakkavyapi,
Upaiyika Desavirudhi and Viruddha Viyapisi.
- Line 277. Dharmasvarupa viparita sadhanam, Dharma visheda
viparita sadhanam, Dharmisvarupa viparita sadhanam
and Dharmi visheda viparita sadhanam.
- Line 327. Sadhanmya and Vaidhanmya
- Line 329. Sadhana dharma vikalam, Sadhya dharma vikalam,
Upaya dharma vikalam, Ananvayam and Viparita
Ananvayam.
- Line 338. Sadhya avya viruddhi, Sadhana ayya viruddhi,
Upaya avya viruddhi, Ayya vyatireka and Viparita
vyatireka.

30. The Maiden's Askesis to Overcome Birth

(Sage Aravana teaches Manimekalai the way to realise the Truth of Being according to *Buddhist* philosophy. Her mind illumined, she dedicates herself to the ideal life that leads to salvation).

Performing charity, disciplined by
 Virtue, she who knew of all her past births
 Thrice saluted the three jewels, *Buddha*,
Dharma and *Sangha*, therein taking her
 Refuge, after surrendering all.
 He began telling her about the Lord
 Who was *dharma* incarnate. "In that age
 When knowledge had weakened, on the request
 Of gods, he descended from *Tushita*
 Heaven, sat beneath the tree of *Bodhi*,
 Defeated *Mara*, became a hero. 10
 The beautiful one spoke joy-giving words
 That destroy completely the three defects.
 Also, countless *Buddhas* before his time
 Spoke words of wisdom out of compassion.
 These words of the *Buddhas* speak of the twelve
 Inter-linked conditions that appear
 And reappear one from the other
 As a circle. When the cause is removed
 This chain is undone. Where the cause is not, 20
 The effect vanishes; where the cause is,
 The effects come to being. According
 To the effects, the causes are found out
 And the conditions enumerated.
 These are of four categories and have
 Within them three varieties of junctions.
 There are three kinds of birth in existence
 And so too the time for birth is three-fold.
 For realisation, we need to learn
 The misery of birth which is fleeting 30
 And grows out of faults, fate and their result.
 The basal support of the four-fold truth,
 Home of the five forms of mundane consciousness,

Reaching out with its six-fold conventions,
 Gaining the four-fold questions and answers,
 Without creation or dissolution,
 A continuous series with no break,
 Neither making others nor being made,
 With no sense of ego or possession,
 With no sense of the past or the future,
 Neither ending itself nor with an end,
 Resulting from action and its result,
 Birth and Release, are the twelve *Nidhanas*.
 They who know the truth of these: Ignorance,
 Action, Consciousness, Name-form, Sense organs,
 Feelings, Experience, Thirst, Attachment,
 Existence, Birth, and the result of deeds done,
 Know the path of Release: they who know not
 Will have to go to Hell and suffer there.
 'What is ignorance?' The answer is: It is
 Not understanding the above-mentioned,
 Being deluded by what others say
 And agreeing that the rabbit has horns.
 Countless the living beings existing
 In the three worlds: they are of six classes.
 Mortals, gods, *Brahmas*, denizens of Hell,
 Animal species and spirits are these.
 Following one's good or bad deeds in the past
 One enters the womb already prescribed.
 Even as an embryo, the beings
 Experience the result of deeds, thereby
 Gathering great happiness or sadness.
 'What are bad deeds?' To this your question,
 O bejewelled good girl, listen to this.
 From the physical body appear
 Murder, theft and desire for wrong passion;
 From speech appear untruth, backbiting,
 Words of harshness and purposeless talking;
 From the mind appears covetousness,
 Anger and illusory understanding.
 Men of right thinking who understand these
 Ten deeds avoid them: if they happen to
 Do them, they become animals, spirits,

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And Hell's denizens and suffer sorrow.
 'What are good deeds?' Answer to this question:
 Avoiding the ten deeds described above,
 Disciplined by virtue, and doing deeds
 Of charity leads to birth in the three
 Higher species, gods, mortals and *Brahmas*
 That gives joy which comes of doing good deeds.
 Consciousness is the inert, inactive
 State of mind that is found during one's sleep.
 Name-form is the feeling mentioned above
 When it is found abiding in the body.
 The six sense organs bridge consciousness to
 The objects perceived and also desired.
 Sensuous feeling is that when the mind
 And the senses contact external things.
 Experience is the sense of enjoyment.
 Thirst comes when there is no satisfaction.
 Attachment is the desire to want more.
 As the result of one's deeds, existence
 Arrives, dealing appropriate reaping.
 Birth comes to us according to past deeds
 In any of the several birth forms
 Following the law of cause and effect.
 Disease is contrariness to nature
 Which affects the body and gives it pain.
 Old age is the weakening of body's
 Resistance to the blows of one's past deeds.
 Death occurs when this body with a name
 And form vanishes like the setting sun.
 From ignorance appears all action;
 Action leads to the birth of consciousness;
 Consciousness proceeds to take a Name-form;
 From this name-form appear sense organs;
 Sense organs lead to sensuous feelings;
 These feelings result in experience;
 From this experience arises thirst;
 Again, from this thirst issues attachment.
 This attachment gives rise to existence.
 From what is existence, there appears
 The taking of births in different forms.

80

90

100

110

From birth proceed old age, sickness and death,
 Distress, lamentation and helplessness,
 All this leading to one's ceaseless sorrow.
 Such is the cycle of experience.

But when ignorance goes, action ceases;
 When action is not, consciousness ceases;
 When consciousness goes, name-form ceases too.
 When name-form ceases, sense organs withdraw.
 When sense organs cease, there is no contact.
 Where contact goes, experience is not.
 Where experience ceases, thirst is not.
 When there is no thirst, attachment ceases
 When there is no attachment, existence

120

Is not. Absence of existence leads to
 Non-birth. With the cessation of birth forms
 Rebirth is gone! and with this birth, sickness,
 Old age, death, distress, lamentation and
 Helplessness as also ceaseless sorrow
 Will all be destroyed. This is cessation.

130

The Prime Division is known to be so
 Because it consists of ignorance and action
 That cause all the evils that follow.

The Second Division is made up of
 Consciousness, name-form, sense organs, contact,
 And experience. These are the direct
 Outcome of the nature of the former.

140

The Third Division does constitute thirst,
 Attachment and the collection of deeds.
 These are given rise to by what precedes
 In the process of cause and its effect.

Of the Fourth Division now: birth, sickness,
 Old age, death. Such are the sorrowful things
 That proceed from one's taking birth on earth.
 The Prime Junction is between action
 And consciousness. The crystalline Second One

150

Is between one's experience and thirst:
 The collection of deeds and continuous
 Births that go on make up the Third Junction.
 Speaking of the three kinds of birth, they be
 Birth with the consciousness of the supreme

Wisdom which leads to the path of Release;
 With a body of active consciousness
 As mortal beings, gods and animals.
 When we consider the three kinds of time:
 Ignorance that denies memory and 160
 Action, comprises of what is known as past:
 The present time consists of consciousness,
 Name-form, sense organs, external contact,
 Experience, thirst, attachment, existence,
 And birth which follow one after another:
 As future time are enumerated
 Birth, sickness, old age, death, unhappiness,
 Lamentation, helplessness, and sorrow.
 Desire, attachment and ignorance are
 Counted as conditions which are faulty. 170
 Existence and fate come from faulty deeds.
 Resulting from faulty deeds in past life
 There come consciousness, name-form, sense organs,
 Feelings, experience, birth, age, sickness
 And death. Faulty deeds and results give pain.
 The forms that proceed from these are fleeting.
 Realisation is the knowledge that
 None of these has anything called soul.
 To know that nothing but pain constitutes
 Consciousness, name-form, sense organs, feelings, 180
 Experience, birth, sickness, old age, death,
 Unhappiness, lamentation, helplessness
 And sorrow. Pain is caused by ignorance,
 Action, desire, attachment and also
 The collection of one's past deeds. Desire
 Is the root cause of births and pain. Desire's
 Removal leads to the way of Release
 And to happiness: these are the four Truths.
 The five branches are form, experience,
 Indication, abstraction and knowledge. 190
 To explain rightly the six conventions:
 Totality, linkage, special nature,
 Common parlance; conventions with these four
 As base appear as made up of Truth,
 As that made of what is non-existent,

Of Truth with what is, of the non-Truth with
 What is not, of the non-Truth with what is
 And of Truth with what is not. Speaking of
 Totality we have body, water,
 Country. Of the linkage of seed, sprout, stalk, 200
 We call the whole entity paddy.
 To point out by special nature is
 To speak of a thing as fleeting, as born,
 Or as becoming old. Common parlance
 Is defining a group of letters
 As a word, or a set of days as a month.
 Truthful convention is to state what is.
 Non-truthful is saying a hare has horns.
 Truthful is to say that consciousness has
 With it experience. The convention 210
 Of non-Truthful with what is, is saying
 'Consciousness appeared as a lightning flash.'
 The convention of Truth with what is not
 Is to speak as fact what has not happened.
 That of non-Truth with what does not exist!
 'As a hare has no horns, it exists not.'
 The four principles are: the integral,
 The divisive the definite and Truth.
 The integral principle is to see
 As a whole the given cause and effect. 220
 The divisive is not to understand
 The unity of cause and its effect.
 The definite principle is to say
 There is no soul that is supposed to help
 In understanding the reasons behind
 The original cause and its effects.
 The principle of truth is to say that
 'Paddy sprouts from paddy.' The uses are
 To know that everything is only
 Linkage, we should avoid attachment there, 230
 Nor think that there is a doer behind,
 And that causes alone lead to effect,
 And that it is not that nor what is not;
 Such is the four-fold principles given.
 There are four questions and answers: to give

Direct answers, to reply in stages,
 To counter-question, and to keep silent.
 'Will what has appeared vanish also?'
 'It will vanish,' such the direct reply.
 'Will a dead man be born again or not?' 240
 To this question a reply in stages
 Would be: 'Did he gain detachment? Or else,
 Did he die with attachment?' they say.
 Counter-question is: 'Did the seed come first?
 Or the palmyra tree appeared first? Tell me!'
 Reply: 'Which palmyra tree to which seed?'
 To keep silent: 'Is the sky flower old
 Or is it new?' To this questioner
 Remaining silent without an answer.
 It is no outsider who keeps us in 250
 Bondage or release or causes either.
 All that we described as above are caused
 By desire, anger and illusion.
 To snap attachment by recognising
 Impermanence, pain, soullessness and dirt;
 May your anger cease by good consciousness
 Of friendship, compassion and joyful thought.
 Give up illusion by reading scriptures,
 By meditation, contemplation and
 Realisation. Be freed from mental 260
 Darkness by these four!" Thus with firm good words
 He illumed the lamp of knowledge for her.
 Having heard *Dharma*, inclined to austerity,
 The maid renounced to overcome bondage.

Lines 1-5. Saluting saluting while repeating 'I take
 thrice : refuge in Buddha': 'I take refuge
 in Dharma': 'I take refuge in Sang-
 ha'. This might also mean saluting
 with thought, word and deed.

Lines 9-10. Tushita Heaven is where the Bodhisattvas are
 said to remain before descending to the earth
 as Buddhas.

- Line 13. three defects : lust, anger, ignorance.
- Lines 16-17. See canto 24, line 105.
- Line 25. The twelve conditions of existence are divided into four categories. Ignorance and action belong to the first category; consciousness, name-form, sense organs, sensuous feeling and experience form the second; thirst, attachment and existence form the third; birth and disease make up the last category.
- Line 26. the three action — consciousness; sensuous
junctions : feeling -- thirst; existence --
birth.
- Line 27. three kinds
of birth : as man, god and animal.
- Line 28. time : past, present, future.
- Line 32. see canto 2, 11. 64-67.
- Line 33. The five forms of mundane consciousness or Pancha Skandhas are form, experience, indication, abstraction and knowledge.
- Line 34. six-fold conventions are totality, linkage, special nature, common parlance, the true and the untrue.
- Line 35. four-fold forms of excellence: the integral, the divisive, the definite and the Truth.
- Line 36. four-fold : to give direct answers, to reply questions and in stages, to counter-question answers and to keep silent.
- Line 38. continuous known as santana it has four
series : varieties: vayu, deepa, dhara and pipeelika.

- Lines 82-83. Consciousness is like the state of the mind which is not affected by the senses.
- inert, active : doing nothing enjoying nothing,
a mere witness.
- Line 85. it : consciousness.
- Lines 98-99. "Disease (Pini) is the result of the change of circumstances and conditions that affect the body. This may set in relation to his deeds also. In short, this is a bodily ailment. Old age (Muppu) indicates the wear and tear of the physical body due to constant striving till death. Death (Sakkadu) results in that the body ultimately disappears as the sun sets."
- N.Balusamy, Studies in Manimekalai, p.115.
- Lines 104-118. These lines describe the inexorable Law of Causation.
- Lines 134-137. Of the twelve Nidhanas or conditions of existence, Ignorance and Action form the first division, as they are the root cause of all the other evils of existence.
- Lines 148-152. "Action and consciousness form the first link (sandi). Sensation and desire, faultlessly understood, form the second link. From good and evil deeds (or existence) to proceed to births is the third link."
- V. Kanakasabhai, The Tamils Eighteen Hundred Years Ago, p. 222.
- Line 188. four Truths : Suffering, Cause of Suffering, Removal of Suffering, Way to Remove Suffering.

Lines 189-190. The Pancha Skandhas (branches or aggregates) are form (organised body), sensation, perception, discrimination and consciousness.

Line 191. conventions : modes of expression.

Lines 217-228. "There are four excellent faculties of the mind which perceive (i) Agreement, (ii) Non-agreement, (iii) Non-action and (iv) Action. To understand the connection of cause and effect in objects is to perceive agreement. To distinguish objects individually is to perceive non-agreement. To say that the mind cannot understand the primary cause which leads to effect in eternal and temporary objects is to perceive non-action. To say that the germ of rice springs out of the rice seed is perception of action."

-- V.Kanakasabhai, The Tamils Eighteen Hundred Years Ago, p. 224.

Line 228. uses : benefits accruing from the above knowledge.

Line 257. maitri bhavana, karuna bhavana and mudita bhavana.

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